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FLOWERS AND GARDENS

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Notes on Plant Beauty

BY A MEDICAL MAN

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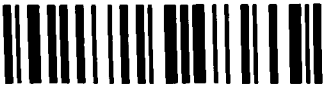
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PREFACE.

THE following papers have been written during a last illness, which has often made it impossible to examine the specimens I could have wished. In the Primrose, for example, I have only been able to make out satisfactorily the drooping aspect of the leaf: how this combines itself with the more rigid character in the different stages of the leaf I do not fully understand. For the same reason many of the illustrations, especially in the chapters on Gardening, have been selected as being the most ready to hand rather than as the best. In my remarks on Gardening I have no wish at all to disparage the

modern systems. My aim chiefly was to point out the faults of modern gardening, because its merits are such as it is impossible to overlook. Lastly, in many instances my remarks bear more or less reference to the works of Ruskin, the greatest and best of art-teachers; but where I have consciously borrowed from him, I have said so. These papers are left in charge of a friend for publication.

FORBES WATSON.

The pen fell from the hand of my friend when he had written the foregoing lines. Within two days he was taken "home" to his "Father's house." This short interval was filled with intense suffering, save only during a brief sleep, when the flowers of which he had been writing, and which loving hands brought to blossom near

his bed, haunted with their beauty and perfume the unsleeping sense of the imagination, and lured him through enchanted fields, where in his dream he saw vision after vision of an unutterable glory of floral splendour. The ecstasy of his delight in that dream abode with him, and lifted a bright light over the few hours of agony that intervened ere he slept again in the peace of Death. He believed a foretaste had been given him of "that which remaineth for them that love God"—that He whose dying lips were touched with gall had given him a sweeter anodyne in his brief agony.

The papers published in this little volume were written to solace the languor of the last months of life, when a malady, which had crept by slow approaches upon him, broke down his strength, and arrested a professional career which had begun but recently. They betoken a mind

gifted with quick, clear, and delicate perception, independency of judgment, and unsparing truthfulness. These were my friend's characteristic gifts. They are dimly mirrored in these pages, but more clearly in the memory of those who knew him well. To them this little volume will be welcome, because of him: to others, perchance, it may be welcome for the worth it has, because it tells of the beauty there is in God's fairest, frailest handiwork in flowers, and bears some trace of the rarer amaranthine beauty of a soul which wore "the white flower of a blameless life."

J. B. P.

CONTENTS.

PART I.—FLOWERS.

	PAGE
I. THE SNOWDROP	3
II. THE YELLOW CROCUS	22
III. THE PURPLE CROCUS	33
IV. THE VIOLET	45
V. THE COWSLIP	55
VI. THE PRIMROSE	68
VII. THE GLOBE FLOWER	83
VIII. THE BLACKTHORN, OR SLOE	87
IX. THE POET'S NARCISSUS	92
X. THE SNOWFLAKE (*Leucojum Æstivum*)	96
XI. THE WHITE LILY	103
XII. THE DAFFODIL	105

PART II.—GARDENS.

I. FAULTS IN GARDENING	119
II. ON GARDENERS' FLOWERS	172

PART III.—VEGETATION.

I. SPRING AND SUMMER VEGETATION	235
II. ON THE WITHERING OF PLANTS	250

PART I.

FLOWERS.

I.

THE SNOWDROP.

IF we examine our garden borders a little after Christmas, we are generally pretty sure of discovering the first signal of returning spring in the green points of the Snowdrop clusters just peeping through the ground. Looking rather more closely, we find that each plant has put forth two leaves, which cohere so as to form at the summit a short conical beak, tipped with a blunt, protective, callous point. This green beak is all that is visible at this early stage of growth, and is admirably fitted by its wedge-like character for thrusting through the soil. The flower lies at present deep sunk between the leaves, and un-

developed, waiting till they have cleared its way to light and air. Then the leaves separate and expand, the flower rapidly outgrows them, and before they have attained full size it has withered.

But what I wish more particularly to notice now is the white callous tip of the beak to which I have just alluded as fitting it for piercing the ground. This is not a mere temporary provision. It persists in the full-grown leaf, and is common to many of the Endogenous* plants, being particularly well seen in the Snowdrop, Daffodil, and Hyacinth, in all of which it resembles a little waxen point. And how wonderfully it adds to the beauty of these plants! Every artist knows what a striking effect can be given by a few well-

* Endogenous plants are those whose leaves have parallel veins like grasses, as distinguished from Exogenous plants, like Foxglove, &c., whose leaves are net veined.

placed dots to a broken line. And just so is it here. Their sparkling, dotty appearance makes the Snowdrop clusters look interesting and animated from the first moment that their tips pierce the ground. And in every later stage the leaves of both Snowdrop and Daffodil would seem tame and meaningless without it. But this is only a very small part of the matter. The dot has a much higher purpose than that of merely giving pleasure to the eye by contrast, like dewdrops scattered over grass. It is most essential for the thorough enjoyment of beauty that we should get at it as rapidly and with as little effort as possible, for some of the most delightful sensuous impressions are very transient, and remain but for an instant in their full intensity. Look, for example, at a bright scarlet Ranunculus in the sunlight. You see the scarlet for a second, and then it changes into brown. You must turn your eyes

away before you can renew the impression. And what is true of colour-beauty is to some extent true also of every other kind. This does not at all interfere with the fact that the longer we look the more we shall discover, and that some of the deepest impressions come latest. I only mean that no impression can last unimpaired. Every moment we may be gaining something fresh, but we are also losing hold of something which we had the moment before. There is a good illustration of this in the difference between childhood and maturity. The man in most respects may see deeper than the child, but he has lost the freshness and vividness of childhood's first perceptions. The eye then needs to get at beauty rapidly, and also needs something to assist it in holding the main bearings in view as it passes from part to part, or in recovering them when it has lost them. Now all this the dot helps to accomplish. It

emphasises just that point which should catch the eye at once, guiding it straight to the outlines or leading lines, and rescuing the whole plant from what might otherwise appear but a confused patch of green. This plan of leading the eye is continually adopted by painters. There is a good example of it in Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper," where the radiating beams of the roof and main lines of the bodies of the disciples converge towards the head of Christ, thus carrying us at once to the grand point of the picture. The means which are used in different kinds of leaves to make the outlines more noticeable are often well worth examining. Sometimes it is by thickening, as in the case we have already mentioned, sometimes by means exactly opposite. Very frequently, as in the Lily of the Valley, a thin line of cuticle surrounds the leaf, and gleams in the light by its transparency. In the common

purple Iris of the gardens, where the leaf is like a broad sharp sword-blade, there is a gradual thinning from the centre towards the edges, as well as a translucent margin. So that look at what distance you will, the large broad surfaces are easily distinguishable from each other by mere differences of light and shade.

We now pass on to the flower of the Snowdrop. This, as every one knows, droops from the end of a slender stalk, which arises at the top of the stem from a sheath-like bract or spathe. Now look at that slender stalk, and notice particularly the character of the bend it makes. This is not, as it is sometimes represented in drawings, a gradual, arching curve. The stalk would then look weak, as if bent by the weight of the flower, and such a condition can never naturally be found, except in a sickly Snowdrop, or else in double blossoms, where it is extremely common. And notice, if

you have met with any such specimen, how completely all its beauty is destroyed. In a healthy Snowdrop this stalk is for the most part nearly straight, bending slightly, and only slightly, to the weight of the flower.* Slender though it be, it seems to assert its own freedom and perfect ability to stand as upright as it pleases. But just at the end it makes a sudden hook downwards, and this little hook permits the drooping. And how exquisite is the result! We have said that the little flower-stalk is nearly straight. But it must be saved from an appearance of over-straightness, and this is effected by the investing sheath-like bract, which curves over it like a pruning-hook. Cut away the bract, and notice how you spoil the arch. Now take up the

* If the flower be young, there will be hardly any perceptible bend in the slender flower-stalk; it will bend just slightly in an older specimen.

blossom, and hold it upside downwards, with the cup erect, the contrary position to that in which it was meant to be seen. How completely its loveliness has vanished! What an insipid flower it would be if that were its natural posture, the petals wanting in breadth, the whole aspect destitute of character! Everything is right if seen just as was originally intended, and wrong otherwise.

But here a difficulty presents itself. I notice that the three inner petals are carefully ribbed on their internal surface with bright green parallel veins, evidently for the purpose of ornament, and that Nature has furthermore taken the trouble to colour the stamens orange, so as to complete the harmony. Now, in the ordinary position of the flower, the only position in which it can appear beautiful as a whole, these green lines and stamens are scarcely to be seen. Where was the necessity for troubling about them if the

flower was never intended to be looked at upside downwards? The answer, I think, must be this. We make the acquaintance of any individual existence under an immense number of different aspects, and it is the sum of all these aspects which constitutes that existence to us. A Snowdrop, for instance, is not to me merely such a figure as a painter might give me by copying the flower when placed so that its loveliness shall be best apparent, but a curious mental combination or selection from the figures which the flower may present when placed in every possible position, and in every aspect which it has worn from birth to grave, and coloured by all the associations which have chanced to cling around it. To the bodily eye which beholds it for the first time, it might be of no consequence what lay within the petals, though even then the imagination would be whispering some solution of the secret;

but to the eye of mind, when the flower has been often seen, that hidden green and yellow which is necessary to complete the harmony becomes distinctly visible—visible, that is, in that strange, indefinite way in which all things, however apparently incompatible, seem present and blended together when the imaginative faculty is at work. The common Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) is a good illustration of the working of this principle. When I look at the beautiful silver white of the inner surface of the petals, my mind is always dwelling upon and rejoicing in the fact that their outer side is green, though of that green outside I cannot see a hair's breadth. Again, we find the same principle at work in the feeling which compelled the old sculptors to finish the hidden side of the statue. They said, "For the gods are everywhere." They meant that when they looked upon their labours the ima-

gination would necessarily carry away their thoughts to that hidden side, and that, if not finished like the rest, it would have pained them by its incompleteness. Of course, when Snowdrops are placed together in a bunch, we see in some the full beauty of the interior, whilst the defects of that position are covered by the presence of the surrounding flowers.

We next come to the name, and in the whole vocabulary of plants it will be difficult to find another which goes so straight to its mark, and renders so perfectly the distinctive character and expression. Even the generic name of Linnæus, though designed like all such for the purposes rather of science than of poetry, is beautiful both in meaning and in form. Galanthus—that is to say, "Milk Flower," from Γάλα ἄνθος—perhaps comes nearer to the actual colour than even our native Saxon, and expresses the softness and

purity of the blossom, as well as the glaucous milky aspect of leaf and stem. We have all the delicious clearness and purity of sound so usual in Greek words; and the termination "anthus," or "lanthus," seems peculiarly well fitted to render the character of many Endogens with a sharp, tapering, lance-like form of leaf.* This is not from any accidental association with the word "lance," but rather from both these words being to a certain extent alike in expression.

But what is this scientific name when compared with the "Snowdrop" of our native tongue? How insignificant is that nearer rendering of sensuous character and colour, deeply capable as these are of expressing soul—of conveying the spiritual meaning and essence, when

* More especially adapted, if my feeling be correct, to plants with lance-shaped leaves and a leafy stem, like some of the garden Fritillarias.

placed beside that which sets forth not form and aspect merely, but the relation of these to what we know of the plant, to the history of its life and struggle, and all that most endears it to our affections! Such a name as Galanthus only gives what we might easily discern if the flower were a perfect stranger, and even here it would be far inferior to Snowdrop. But this is a very small part of what we ought to see in the flower. It is not the clustering associations merely—a word which we hate, on their own principles, from its connection with the school of Alison and Jeffrey—but the exquisite manner in which it symbolises the changes of the season which gives it birth. This will best be shown by closely studying the expression. Look at the flower as it first appears at the end of January, when winter is closed, or at least its main strength broken. The snow is thawing, the sky overcast, not a single cheering

sunbeam; yet one Snowdrop has ventured forth, and there it stands, alone in its purity, with drooping head, and petals not unfolded, modest, patient, unobtrusive, yet calm and serene, as if assured of victory over storm and cloud. The branches of the trees are naked and dripping, the stoutest plants have hid their blossoms; yet this fair one, apparently as tender as a maiden, through some unseen strength can brave the rigour of the time. We hail it as the herald of deliverance, the foremost of our long-lost friends. The Master of the great earth-ark has sent out his dove to stay with us, and it tells us that the rest will quickly follow. In this solitary coming forth, which is far more beautiful when we chance to see it thus amidst the melting snow, rather than on the dark bare earth, the kind little flower, however it may gladden us, seems itself to wear an aspect almost of sorrow. Yet wait

another day or two till the clouds have broken, and its brave hope is accomplished, and the solitary one has become a troop, and all down the garden amongst the shrubs the little white bunches are dancing gaily in the breeze. Few flowers undergo such striking change of aspect, so mournful in its early drooping, so gladsome when full-blown and dancing in the sunshine.*

But what is its relation to the snow? A relation such as no other flower of that season bears; for, like one of those emblematic pageants in which our ancestors delighted, it presents in silent masque the change that is passing, the green inhabitant issuing from its slumber in the earth and holding forth a semblance of snow just

* I do not suppose that a Snowdrop like that which I have described will have actually pushed up through the snow. It will generally be found in some sheltered spot, and most probably is but some bud which has been imperfectly covered.

melting into dew. The Snowdrop is a very star of hope in a season of wreck and dismay, the one bright link between the perishing good of the past and the better which has not yet begun to follow. All around is troubled; the beauty of the snow has vanished, whilst that of the spring has not yet arrived; and here is a promise that the lower form of purity shall be replaced by a higher and more perfect, the purity of a nobler form of life—better, as the flower is better than the snow crystal, the man than the child, the sinner redeemed than the angels, if such there are, who have never needed repentance. And this less perfect old must perish, that from its death may arise the more perfect new.

And though every form of life, whether high or low, has its own peculiar beauty, yet little here is lost in comparison with what we gain. Snow and ice are cold, deathlike, dreary. Here is a

flower which preserves one of the choicest beauties of the snow, and shows what we might otherwise have deemed impossible—that this beauty can be made compatible with life of a more active kind. This is but one of the lower steps of a ladder which must end in heaven, pointing us to a union of happinesses which cannot coexist on earth, where activity destroys contemplation, the fruit the flower, and the love of near relationship forbids the deepest kind. Are these thoughts fanciful or arbitrary? Is it merely by accident that this flower awakens them, by some chance interweaving of its form with our feelings at the time of its birth, or is it not rather plain that every portion of its fabric was exactly framed with a view to awaken and express such feelings? If arbitrary, the thought would be comparatively worthless; its value chiefly consists in its being a true reading of nature.

Let us look, for instance, at just one of these unimportant accidents of structure, as some utilitarians would consider them, though perhaps as necessary to the well-being of the plant as they unquestionably are to its loveliness. See how the whole make of the flower contributes to its drop-like character, the most essential feature in the expression. Now, if one simple change were made, this character would be wholly lost. There are plenty of drooping flowers amongst the Liliaceæ. Suppose that the Snowdrop had been a Liliaceous instead of an Amaryllidaceous plant. The two orders so nearly resemble each other that no visible change would be needed *except this one*—that the green drop-like ovary would be contained *within* the corolla, instead of being *outside* it. And thus the form of the double drop would be lost, for the corolla would spring directly from the flower-stalk. We may also notice, when the

flower is closed and the fitness of its name most manifestly seen, how the white corolla, so narrow where it leaves the ovary, lets its fulness run down into the tip, so as to give the form of a dewdrop just parting from the stalk which bears it.*

* Do not take too young a flower in examining this last point.

II.

THE YELLOW CROCUS.*

WHILST the Snowdrop enters with so quiet a footstep that it might almost pass unobserved amidst the remnants of the melting snow, the Crocus bursts upon us in a blaze of colour like the sunrise of the flowers. Ῥωδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς, the "rosy-fingered dawn" of spring, are the words which rise to our lips instinctively as we look upon it. Most gladsome of the early flowers! None gives more glowing welcome to the season, or strikes on our first glance with a

* Examine good out-of-door specimens, and avoid as much as possible the later blossoms of the season, which are often very faulty.

ray of keener pleasure when, with some bright morning's warmth, the solitary golden fingers have kindled into knots of thick-clustered yellow bloom on the borders of the cottage-garden. At a distance the eye is caught by that glowing patch, its warm heart open to the sun, and dear to the honey-gathering bees which hum around the chalices.

This is one of the many plants which are spoilt by too much meddling. If the gardener too frequently separates the offsets, the individual blooms may possibly be finer, but the lover of flowers will miss the most striking charms of the humbler and more neglected plant. The reason is this: the bloom, when first opening, is of a deeper orange than afterwards, and this depth of hue is seemingly increased when the blossoms are small from crowded growth. In these little clusters, therefore, where the flowers

are of various sizes, the colour gains in variety and depth, as well as in extent of surface, and vividness of colour is the most important point in the expression of the Yellow Crocus.

I have called the Crocus Ῥωδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς, and the expression has an additional meaning if we look upon the flower some morning of gleaming doubtful sunshine, when it is uncertain whether to expand or no. Perhaps the folded petal reveals a glimpse of the deeper orange within, and at times you see playing over the outer surface, and melting into that deeper flame, a faint rosy tint, soft and delicate as that which the sunset casts when it fades upon the summits of the Alps. Then gather a flower, and look into it when expanded in more steady sunlight. You will see that what at first seem the white reflections are in every part of this exquisite rose-colour, or violet, which looks beautiful

under the microscope in a strip of the petal skin. It was this tint which, playing over the outside of the flower, and perhaps blending with a glimpse of orange from within, caused the appearance we have noticed. And now let us study the flower a little more closely. Take one fully expanded, and hold it so that the light may enter the cup; you see there are six petals, three outer and three inner. Though at first sight apparently alike in colour, close attention will show that the inner segments are of deeper hue and more distinctly orange than the outer. This does not matter much to us just now, except as tending to give variety and gradation. But we must carefully observe the colour itself. Like most things that are very beautiful, it varies greatly in different aspects: the petals to a careless eye, and especially in a dull light, may seem but a surface of glossy orange. Yet look carefully, and

they are lighted with rosy reflections, pencilled with delicate streaks and nerves of shade, and, above all, bestrewed with little gleaming points, a host of microscopic stars which cast a fiery sheen like that of the forked feathers of the Bar-tailed Humming-bird, as if the surface were engrained with dust of amber or of gold. And with all this there is united what seems almost a transparency, like that of topaz or some precious gem, giving us an idea of that fine gold "like transparent glass," which we never understand till we see it in the clouds at sunset.

But there is perhaps even yet a deeper loveliness in the flower. What is that in the lower portion of the chalice which makes it seem not so much as if inlaid with colour like the rest, but rather as if dim golden flame lay burning there, a liquid atmosphere of light? The wall, when we look closely, is paler and more trans-

parent in seeming, or rather its substantial colour has given place to a pale yellow surface like shaded pearl, mirror-like and lustrous, changing whenever we move it, here bright when it seems to catch the golden reflections from above, here darkening as we turn it into the shade. We might almost compare it to the darker yet luminous portion at the base of an ordinary gas-flame. To make out the cause of this let us break off a petal and examine it. We find the pearly surface still there, and unaltered except in its brilliancy being subdued. The colour is, therefore, evidently due in part to reflected light, as it seemed to be; and this may easily be proved by further experiment. Let a narrow strip of black paper be inserted into the corolla, so as to cut off the light reflected from the surrounding walls, but not that which comes directly from the sun. The greater part of the brilliancy is now

seen to be lost. Look again at the bottom of the corolla, where the stamens arise from it. There is a little ring of light around them which no change of position can affect. But if stamens and pistil be cut away, this light will disappear at once, showing that it is but a reflection, and very valuable, because illuminating the point which light can least easily reach.

But we have said that the change in the severed petals was not in kind, but in degree. How are we to account for the character which it still retains? Beginning at the bottom of the petal, let us strip off the skin, as we can easily do, from base to point of the inner face. We have now made the petal colourless—colourless, that is, so far as there is anything valuable in colour. Nothing is left but a pale, tawny, fleshy lamina, streaked with part parallel, part radiating veins. The space at the base of the petal still remains,

being more transparent than the rest when we look through it, and still changeful in different positions, though only from light to shade, after the pearly fashion of ordinary cellular tissue. Its greater clearness is due partly to an increased transparency of its cellular tissues, and partly to its main thickness being occupied by the vessels entering the petal. Vessels are always very transparent; this quality enables us to trace them with the naked eye wherever they go, and of course they give transparency wherever they happen to be numerous. The cellular tissue is, on the contrary, opaque and lustreless in the upper part of the lamina, the glistening character there becoming wholly lost: this little dissection will enable us to understand the mirror-like aspect. Lastly, as to the difference of colour, you will see that the skin you have stripped off bears the colour of the petal with it.

It is transparent—glances in the sun like gold-leaf: and you may observe that the colouring matter is much less in quantity in the part which corresponds with the pearly surface. In the Purple Crocus the colour in this part of the skin is absolutely wanting, and whatever faint colour may seem present there, shines through from the outer surface. We need not stay longer to notice the elevations and depressions of the mirror-like portion, or the extreme thinness and incurving of the margin of the petal here, which all tend in various ways to increase the effect.

But has it been worth our while to give this minute attention to the colour of a flower? Unquestionably yes, for it is only by this close, poring attention that we shall ever understand its beauty. Look at it till you have drunk in all its loveliness, or learned the impossibility of doing so; turn it into different positions, view it by

transmitted light,—that is, with the sun-rays coming through it,—and then again by reflected light, or with the rays falling straight upon it. Do this with a number of specimens of different ages, on dull days and on fine ones, and you will not only discover new beauties, but will learn the great difficulty of rightly describing flower-colour. Even Mr. Ruskin has fallen into error here. He attacks O. W. Holmes for the couplet—

> "The spendthrift Crocus, thrusting through the mould,
> Naked and shivering, with his cup of gold."

The lines are evidently faulty enough. The Crocus "naked and shivering!" We might as well say that the flames are shivering on the wintry hearth, for warmth is the very essence of the flower. But to assert that the Crocus is not golden, but saffron, is hypercritical; and, more-

over, scarcely true. It is saffron in a dull light, and in a light still duller it may be almost brown. But what is it when placed in the unclouded sunshine, the only time when the flower is fairly describable as a *cup*? What can we say positively about the colour then? The petals are orange here and yellow there, and everywhere display that shifting glance which we have already described as only comparable to brightest gold, together with a restless glow which, as the sunbeams stir it, seems absolutely to leave the walls, and roll like a fiery atmosphere within. Is not gold the comparison best suited to embrace all this, and most poetical, because most strictly true?

Here, then, is the use of our minute attention. I never noticed the golden gleaming of the Crocus until I began to look minutely. I can see it easily at a distance now, as an element of the ordinary colour.

III.

THE PURPLE CROCUS.*

THE Yellow Crocus is a perfect flower, leaving nothing that we could wish to add to or to alter, and at first sight there seems to be something less satisfactory when we turn from it to look at the Purple Crocus. In the first place, the latter plant is far less elegant in shape. We must follow this carefully and in detail. We shall find that the back of a Yellow Crocus petal

* In these remarks I refer more particularly to the wild flower, *Crocus vernus*. In garden specimens it must be remembered that the shape will be probably more or less distorted, and some injury done to the general harmony of effect, though the tints may be greatly enriched. The less highly cultivated the plant, the better will it answer to my description. The flower should be *wide open* when examined.

is striped with a series of dark lines, of which the central and longest runs on to the end of the petal, while the shorter radiate from it on each side at the base. These lines must not be mistaken for veins. With these they have no connection whatever, not even corresponding with them in position, and being only skin deep, as may readily be seen by peeling the back of the petal. They are, to all appearance, placed there solely for the purpose of ornament. It is best to examine them on one of the outer petals, as on the inner they are but very faintly developed. The value of these lines as affording variety of colour is at once apparent, but their value is still greater with reference to the shape of the flower. The Crocus-cup possesses a double curve; the lower part shorter and less noticeable, a slight undulating fulness at the very bottom of the cup; the upper long, and bending the tip of the petal

inwards, as gracefully as if it were the crest of a wave. Now observe the effect of these lines upon that lower curve. We shall not attempt to describe their arrangement. It would be vain to do so without a diagram, and they can be readily understood by actual inspection of the flower, without which both description and diagram would be useless. It is sufficient to say that they are to some extent parallel, or nearly so, and to some extent divergent. Now, viewing the petal in profile, but so that the dark midline may be distinctly seen, we shall find that this line marks and emphasises the whole length of the double curve from top to bottom of the corolla. Below, the others join it, and, partly by the repetition of line and partly by their darkness, lend additional emphasis and power to the lower curve. But we have already said that these lines are to some extent divergent, radiating in a direction away

from the base of the petal. Partly from this circumstance, and partly from the shape of the figure they form, they guide the eye like a dart to the central line where it runs down into the stalk. And thus we are furnished with a system of leading lines, enabling us, on looking at the flower, to see at a glance the curve of every petal and its relation to the others, and, besides, giving unity to the whole by guiding the eye to the meeting-point in the stalk. The effect of lines at once parallel and divergent is gained by this most beautiful arrangement.

These lines act in just the same way if we look at the petal from the back. They give prominence to the lower swelling by spreading over it like the open fingers of a hand, and serve wherever they go to emphasise the undulations of the surface which they have to traverse.

Now all this in the Purple Crocus is far less

exquisite. The upper curve is less beautifully rounded at the tip, and the lower less distinctly marked, so that the corolla is almost funnel-shaped in the neck. As the lower curve is unimportant, dark parallel stripes, like those of the Yellow Crocus, are, of course, not needed to enforce it. These stripes have accordingly vanished, and are replaced by mere feather-shaped patches of deeper violet, which are all that is needed to insist upon the shape of the flower, and to guide the eye downwards into the tube. Stripes would here be inconvenient as well as unnecessary, because the inner petals are striped, and a somewhat monotonous tone in the outer petals is needed for variety, as well as to convey that general expression of the flower of which we shall presently speak. When we come to examine the full form of the petal at the back, its inferiority in shape becomes still more manifest.

Not only have we lost that undulating character of the surface, which was emphasised so beautifully by the stripes in the Yellow Crocus, but all special delicacy of petal outline is entirely wanting.

Again, we have said that colour is the grand source of expression in the Crocus, and unfortunately in this respect the Purple Crocus too often appears at a disadvantage. In a garden, especially if it be thinly planted, the purplish brown of the naked earth strikes a discord with its hues. Then the colour is apt to be ill-formed, uncertain, and disappointing on a close inspection. Its tints are often improved under the gardener's hands. We sometimes see lovely specimens in the markets, and the colour comes out most brilliantly when the flower is associated with its yellow and white relations on a garden border.*

* The commonest of the White Garden Crocuses is only a pale variety of *C. vernus*.

Do we, then, mean to assert a real inferiority in this flower? Not at all, except in the particulars we have mentioned. We have made this comparison with a double object—partly to render the excellencies of the Yellow Crocus shape more striking by the contrast, and partly to illustrate the general principle that what in one work of Nature seems less perfect as compared with another, is generally only made so as the means of developing some peculiar kind of utility or beauty, with which higher excellence would be incompatible. We by no means think that what is best in the Purple Crocus must come from the gardener, or that it is necessarily seen at best advantage when contrasted with its White and Yellow congeners. We admit at once that it gains here in outward splendour. But it frequently happens that what is dearest and deepest in any flower is best seen when that flower is

observed alone. Each generally contains in itself sufficient elements of contrast; and needs no others to assist them. And so we shall find it here. In the first place, the Purple Crocus differs widely from the Yellow in expression. The latter is seen to best advantage at noonday, in the clear warm sunshine. It is bright, animated, cheering—our heart "leaps up" as we behold it. This active character seems to demand a greater vivacity in the curves, a vivacity which would be merely trivial in the Purple Crocus. You would no more wish to see it there than to see the Madonna in the graceful attitudes of a dancer. For bright as the Purple Crocus may appear at times, I cannot but think that its deepest expression is one of quiet and repose. It may be beautiful in the broad mid-day sunshine, but not with its fullest beauty. Go into the Nottingham meadows, where the plant grows wild, some warm after-

noon in March, when the dreamy sun has just strength to unfold the petals, and look at the broad pale sheets of lilac bloom outspread upon the early grass, whose sweet young green is only just beginning to recover from the winter's frost, the blooms here thin and scattered, hardly to be distinguished from water left by the retiring floods, and here varied with the dark green flowerless patches of the Autumn Crocus. In that distant colour it can never be surpassed; we see it in the fulness of its glory. Approach too near, and the enchantment vanishes. The fair ranks are now seen trampled by the foot, and bent and broken by the winds. Neither is there the beauty we should expect in the individual flowers. We gather one or two, and the colour seems weak and pale; here and there, on the ground before us, is a touch of livelier purple, but it fades away as we approach it. And yet we remember the time

when we saw no imperfections there, when the blooms were as lovely as now we think them at a distance. Can it be that our enjoyment from them has really, then, diminished? By no means so. Nature asks of us no superstitious blindness; and increased sensibility to beauty will abundantly make amends for whatever losses it may bring. We gather a bunch of flowers, and withdraw, and let the old enchantment of the distant purple return and gather upon us. And then we look at the few well-selected flowers in our hand, and let the mind wander in the depths of those fair-striped cups, their colour so fresh, so cool and delicate, and yet not too cool with that central yellow stamen-column, and the stigma emerging from it like a fiery orange lamp. And now in its turn we feel the full charm and superiority of the Purple Crocus. Try in the same way to lose yourself in one of the golden cups, and you will see

that the mind can hardly endure to linger within the walls of that burning palace:—no rest or coolness is met with to refresh us there. But the Purple Crocus, partly from the full materials for colour-contrast afforded by its interior, partly from the exceeding delicacy of tint, the lilac stripes and markings, the transparent veins, and the pale watery lake which lies at the bottom of the cup, seems to bear us away to some enchanted spot, a fairyland of colour, where no shadow ever falls—a land of dim eternal twilight and never-fading flowers. Note, too, the difference betwixt the Crocuses with regard to the stigma. In the Purple Crocus, where it is needed to complete the harmony of the flower, it rises long and flame-tipped out of the tall bundle of yellow stamens. In the Yellow Crocus, on the contrary, it is not needed for any special purpose, so that the stamens are left very short, and the stigma is

low sunk between them. Notice also the curve of the outside of the Purple Crocus cup in a well-selected flower, and observe how quiet and solemnly beautiful it is, in perfect harmony with the general expression. Most solemn curves are but little varied, as that of a dome, for instance, or of the sky, or of the sea-horizon.

IV.

THE VIOLET.

MILTON in his "Lycidas" speaks of the "glowing violet." What does he mean? Partly, no doubt, he would contrast the colder, bluer tints of the Dog Violet with the purple of the scented kind, a purple which catches the eye in a dim uncertain way, known to all Violet seekers, when the flower lies half hidden amongst herbage, so that we doubt whether we have really discovered one or no. This is Shakespeare's "violets dim." But that is not all. We find that a perfectly scentless flower impresses us as cold. If the Rose or White Jessamine were scentless, it would seem cold like the Camellia or

Blue Gentian of the Alps. As it is, we think them warm. This feeling, of course, may be modified by other circumstances, a smooth, glossy plant seeming colder than a hairy or woolly one; but the feeling still is there. And this, I believe, leads Milton to call the Violet "glowing." If it were not fragrant, the term would have little meaning; as it is, an idea suggests itself that the flower is slowly burning, and an aroma rising up from it like incense. And it is singular to see what a very faint perfume can give an impression of warmth. We often smell carefully at flowers without detecting the slightest odour, or perhaps nothing more than we find in the Snowdrop—a cold, feeble, unpleasant smell, like vegetable tissues crushed, which is altogether nugatory. But let there be real perfume, though faint as that of the Pyrus Japonica or Crocus, and we recognise it at once as a warm atmosphere about

the flower. The contrast between the Scented and the Dog Violet is a very remarkable one. How nearly they are alike in general aspect, yet how wide a difference in the details! First there are the leaves. Those of the Scented Violet you can tell at a glance, before the flowers are come, by their larger size, rounder heart-shape, downiness, and, above all, by that fresher green upon which, in February and March, we always look so hopefully, remembering the treasures which perhaps lie hidden there. There is nothing at all of such promise in the darker purplish-tinted leaves of the Dog Violet, though they have a smoother, neater, more regular and finished look. Then, as to the flowers, no matter whether white or purple, there is generally a richness and force in the colour of the Scented Violet which impresses us deeply the moment we detect it in the hedge—a richness which seems almost worthy of such

fragrance, the one translating the other, as it were, into a different language. How unlike the Dog Violet, with its larger and gayer, but less impressive, lilac flowers! And yet this latter seems to have managed everything according to the most approved fashion. It has lessened its leaves, made its blossoms more conspicuous in colour, and greatly increased their size and number. The leaves, too, are neater and more correct, freed from hairiness and irregularities; and the whole plant has a smoother and more polished look. It sets itself in far more prominent situations, as if to court our notice, is everywhere visible in the hedge, in the wood, and on the top of sunny open banks; while the Scented kind has a sort of rarity just enough to make it precious, in unfavourable places it cannot bloom at all, so that we search over the leaves in vain, and it mostly prefers to sink back into the shade, or

hide amongst the thick close green of the rising hedge-plants. And there is apt to be a bluish tint in the April herbage, by which this concealment is assisted. The Dog Violet is more noticeable from the causes we have already mentioned, —the situation it chooses, where it will be little crowded or interfered with; the larger size, greater number and more conspicuous colour of the flowers, and the long stalks or side-shoots upon which it sets them. On the whole, we must consider the Dog Violet an unfortunate plant. It never gets the credit it deserves. Beautiful as it is with those lilac blossom clusters, we can hardly bring ourselves to love it deeply—it strikes us so much as a degeneration of the Scented species. The Scented Violet seems like genius in its modest youth, never thinking of display, and almost unconscious, indeed, of its own sweetness and richness. The Dog Violet is this genius

drawn into notice, courted, flattered, and perverted by the world, striving ambitiously for show, and quite unaware that its deepest qualities are lost.

But is it not presumptuous for man to depreciate in this way the perfect work of his Creator? Must not our hearts be wrong if we look with even the least dissatisfaction upon so lovely a flower as this? No, not necessarily. For God has given us all these things as teachers, and the deepest moral truths are presented by them in symbols. There are higher and lower degrees of beauty which we are meant to recognise, and ugliness itself is employed unsparingly, when ugliness is necessary to teach. The ape in a sense is beautiful, fashioned out of microscopic elements as goodly as those of a man; the further you go in studying its structure, the more beauty you will find; yet in general we rightly speak of it with

disgust. Nevertheless, the Dog Violet has a beauty of its own order, which will yield much enjoyment if we will but study it. It is by no means sent forth only to be despised—not even the ape is that, for we may admire its strength and easy dexterity of limb. The Dog Violet is well fitted for the place it occupies; it is a lively, pleasant, neat-looking flower, and its blossoms are very lasting. But in the qualities which touch us most it certainly is deficient; and on comparing it with the Scented Violet, as we cannot possibly help doing, since we first learnt to recognise it by its defects when gathered in mistake, the lesson intended seems apparent. Yet beautiful as the Scented Violet is, its colour will not compare with that of the common Pinguicula or Butterwort, the Violet of the Marsh. In this plant, two or three large flowers, shaped not unlike the Violet, but on

longer stalks, and of far richer purple, rise up from a circle of broad flat leaves, of light yellowish green, ever wet with unctuous secretion, and beautiful in their contrast with the flowers beyond almost anything I know. Yet one defect—they have no smell. Fragrance on the whole seems less common in marsh and water plants. We find it rather in the Thymes, Lavenders, Roses, and Myrtles, and the tenants of a drier soil. Yet even in England we have the Scented Cane, the Yellow Water-lily, and Dog Myrtle, besides other offshoots from the drier orders, as Meadowsweet and the aquatic species of Mint. But when we do find fragrance in the colder and more watery-looking plants, the effect is more delicious from the contrast. It hangs like a warm atmosphere about them, and seems like a superadded life. Take, for instance, the Scented Water-lily of foreign lands; or the Hyacinths and Narcissuses, which

have all a watery cast about them. One word more, and then we quit this subject. Observe how the footstalk of the Scented Violet sweeps over in an arch, and grasps the flower at the top by means of the broad flat lobes of the calyx, which sit astride like a saddle. But we cannot see the junction of the calyx with its stalk. That is covered by an upward prolongation of each separate lobe or sepal; and the consequence is, that each sepal has the look of a loose piece pasted on, the outer one slightly overlapping that immediately above it. Now, the more usual way is for the calyx to appear but a swollen continuation of the flower-stalk, so that the joining point is clear enough, as in the Pinguicula, which we have already mentioned. And we should have expected that the contrary arrangement would be highly unpleasing, as giving a sense of insecurity. But it is not so at all. Nature delights in as-

tonishing us, and every now and then will start out of the beaten path to gain her end by some altogether unexpected means, always making it worth while by gaining some unlooked-for beauty. This, at least, is the surface aspect of the question; more truly the one plan is in its place as necessary and as much a matter of course as the other. This calyx structure is best seen in the Scented Violet; in the Dog Violet the sepals are narrower and more widely separated.

V.

THE COWSLIP.

FEW of our wild flowers give intenser pleasure than the Cowslip, yet perhaps there is scarcely any whose peculiar beauty depends so much upon locality and surroundings. We feel this especially when walking through some rich undulating pasture-country with well-grown trees and hedges, and far away from all thoughts of town, if we come suddenly upon a meadow with thousands of these flowers scattered over it like white flocks of early lambs; and then, as we gather one after another the bunches of pale unequal fingers, how delicious it is to inhale the sweet odour, and look into the quaintly-spotted

cups! There is a homely simplicity about the Cowslip, much like that of the Daisy, though more pensive—the quiet sober look of an unpretending country girl, not strikingly beautiful in feature or attire, but clean and fresh as if newbathed in milk, and carrying us away to thoughts of dairies, flocks, and pasturage, and the manners of a simple primitive time, some golden age of shepherd-life long since gone by. And this is one of the most intense delights of flowers. They afford such a perfect escape from our artificial nineteenth-century way of living, appearing just such a simple unsophisticated race of creatures as we might meet with in a fairy tale. All the restless, uncomfortable passions of constitutions sapped by disease, the vices generated in close-pressed hotbeds of humanity, the anxieties and frauds of the commercial world, seem wholly to have passed away, and we have

come into a region where the inhabitants are simple and good, where evil is rare and slight, and not the fast clinging thing we know. And it does not matter at all that the precise historian tells us there never was a golden shepherd age like that which we are visioning. We know well enough that it is so. We know that it supposes incompatible advantages—the good of all seasons in one. But our golden age is real, for it exists now, and in these flowers. And even if we chance to live where rural simplicity is rare, we may still rejoice for what slight symbol of it is preserved imperishably in the Cowslip.

Cowslips! how the children love them, and go out into the fields on the sunny April mornings to collect them in their little baskets, and then come home and pick the pips to make sweet unintoxicating wine, preserving at the same time untouched a bunch of the goodliest flowers as a

harvest-sheaf of beauty! And then the white soft husks are gathered into balls, and tossed from hand to hand till they drop to pieces, to be trodden upon and forgotten. And so at last, when each sense has had its fill of the flower, and they are thoroughly tired of their play, the children rest from their celebration of the Cowslip. Blessed are such flowers that appeal to every sense. There is nothing here possible of vulgar gluttony, but just a graceful recognition of the lower nature, which steps in for once as the imagination's guest. May not this be part of the reason why the Cowslip is so dearly loved? Cowslip! The name is of ancient Saxon origin, and very appropriate if we consider it well. I have already said that the plant reminds us of flocks of cattle feeding—at first sight I think of sheep and lambs more particularly; and these ideas are carried out in the whiteness and milky cleanliness of the sleek

downy skin, in the fat legs of unequal size, with their lame irregular drooping, as it might be the legs of the little ones crowding round their mothers, and the flowers breathing fragrance sweeter than the sweetest breath of kine. I know how little sensible these remarks will appear to the unimaginative; but I am dealing with facts as they are, and not as we may think they ought to be. Our impressions of flowers are largely built up of these broken multitudinous hintings, often exceedingly vague and indefinite, but by no means wholly arbitrary. It is from these dim suggestions that our ancestors have drawn our present names of flowers, sometimes with deep insight and poetic truth, sometimes with all sorts of flighty and fantastic colouring, lent by medicine, astrology, or alchemy. To take a few examples. In Bee Orchis, Turk's Cap Lily, Corn Blue-bottle, the resemblance is unmistakably

clear, the last name of course pointing at the swollen look of the flower-cup. Archangel (White Dead Nettle), Lady's Fingers, Cuckoo Pint, and Cowslip are more indefinite; you feel them to be true, but cannot perhaps say why. Moneywort we begin to feel more arbitrary, as are Devil's Bit and Solomon's Seal; whilst, finally, Lycopsis, or Wolf-like Bugloss, is wholly unmeaning, and based on no resemblance whatsoever.

Now, the superficial appearance of the Cowslip is strongly suggestive of sheep, but if you will try to coin a name from this suggestion you will feel that it is quite inferior. Lambs and their Mothers, Lambs' Legs, or Lambs in the Meadow, might seem truer to the eye, but they would impress us far less forcibly. And why is this? It is because they leave out the fragrance, the deepest suggestion of all. There is something in

that balmy sweetness which irresistibly connects itself with cows. And more, in looking at the Cowslip we are always most forcibly struck by its apparent wholesomeness and health. This wholesomeness is quite unmistakable. It belongs even to the smell, so widely different from the often oppressive perfume of other plants, as Lilies, Narcissuses, or Violets. Now just such a healthy milk-fed look, just such a sweet healthy odour, is what we find in cows—an odour which breathes around them as they sit at rest in the pasture, and is believed by many, perhaps with truth, to be actually curative of disease. So much, then, for the name of our plant. The "lips," of course, is but a general reference to the shape of the petals, and indicates the source of the fragrance.

"Cowslips wan, that hang the pensive head,"

writes Milton in the "Lycidas." But this is not

true. There certainly are some plants in which Nature seems to hint at an appearance of disease, and then by some special means converts it into a beauty. Take, for instance, the little gland-tipped hairs which clothe the young blossom-stalks of the flowering currant. They look, at first sight, a little questionable, and we might doubt if they were not something like aphides or mildew. But, on examining closer, we find that they are fragrant, and the fragrance shapes the ambiguous suggestion, so that we can view them with unmixed pleasure. And it is the same with the glands beneath the leaves of many plants, as, for instance, those of the common black currant. In themselves they can scarcely be considered as beautiful, but the eye takes delight in them from the moment we discover that they are scented. There is something of the same sort again in the Primrose.

That flower may justly be described as pale, as if from long lingering beneath the shadows of the woods, shut out from light and air; and at this Shakespeare has gently and delicately hinted in the lines which compare it to a girl not as yet consumptive, but gifted with that too early loveliness which will eventually ripen into the disease.

> "Pale primroses,
> Which die unmarried ere they may behold
> Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
> Most incident to maids."

Yet we cannot call even the Primrose "wan." That would mean that it had a sickly expression, a thing which is at all times painful and revolting, and would be especially so in a flower. And the Cowslip, as we have said, is a singularly healthy-looking plant; indeed, nothing about it is more remarkable. It has none of the delicacy

and timidity of the Primrose. All its characters are well and healthily pronounced. The paleness is uniform, steady, and rather impresses us as whiteness, and the yellow of the cup is as rich as gold. The odour is not faint, but saccharine and luscious. It does not shrink into the sheltered covert, but courts the free air and sunshine of the open fields; and instead of its flowers peeping timidly from behind surrounding leaves, it raises them boldly on a stout sufficient stalk, the most conspicuous object in the meadow. We have in the Cowslip no finer spiritual suggestions, none of the more evanescent and retiring beauties, except perhaps in the sleek white skin, with its exquisite softness of tone. Its poetry is the poetry of common life, but of the most delicious common life that can exist. The plant is in some respects careless to the verge of disorder; and you should note that carelessness well till

you feel the force of it, as especially in the lame imperfection of the flower buds, only, perhaps, half of them well developed, and the rest dangling all of unequal lengths. When irregularity is pretty constant it is sure to mean something, as in the lop-sided form of the Begonia leaves, or the unequally divided corolla of the Speedwell.

Essentially, the Cowslip and Primrose are only the same plant in two different forms, the one being convertible into the other. The Primrose is the Cowslip of the woods and sheltered lanes, the Cowslip the Primrose of the fields. And very interesting it is to observe how entirely different is the expression of the two original extremes, in many respects so much alike, and even in the wild state passing into each other by all sorts of intermediate varieties. The Oxlip and the Polyanthus, with its tortoise-shell blossoms, are two of these intermediate forms; the

Polyanthus being a great triumph of the gardener's art, a delightful flower, quite a new creation, and originally produced by cultivation of the Primrose. Another example of this wide difference in the expression of plants which are essentially the same is seen in the Dog and Scented Violets.

Yet, in spite of what we have said, it is by no means uncommon to find Cowslips growing in the woods. And at first sight you may possibly be inclined to think them better than usual, the plant is so large and well nourished. But you may generally be sure that the favourite locality of a plant is, on the whole, that which suits it best. And the advantages of the Wood Cowslip are only apparent, they go no farther than the eye. Just compare it with the Field Cowslip, and see what it has lost in whiteness, and how the compactness and true proportion of the one

plant contrast with the ungoverned looseness of the other. I take the Wood Cowslip at its best. Even in cattle and vegetables, we may be confident, size is not the chiefest good. "The life is more than meat, and the body than raiment."

VI.

THE PRIMROSE.

WHAT a change there is in turning from the Cowslip to the Primrose! This last seems the very flower of delicacy and refinement; not that it shrinks from our notice, for few plants are more easily seen, coming as it does when there is a dearth of flowers, when the first birds are singing, and the first bees humming, and the earliest green putting forth in the March and April woods. And it is one of those plants which dislikes to be looking cheerless, but keeps up a smouldering fire of blossom, from the very opening of the year, if the weather will permit. The source of its expression is a little

difficult to trace, arising from a subtle combination of certain finer elements which are more decided, or else a-wanting, in the Cowslip.

Now in examining the Primrose we must be careful in our choice of plants, for hardly any flower is more variable both in colour and in form; even in a wild state its flowers are sometimes almost pink, and in the leaves we may find any sort of colour—dark green, yellowish green, or green with a tinge of blue, this last being an inclination towards the marked blue-green of the Cowslip. Each kind has generally some peculiar beauties of its own, but the soft dull tints are, on the whole, the best. The dark leaves have sometimes a beautiful softness, but are apt to be a little wanting in character, whilst the glossier and brighter green look harsh and metallic, and their fur, besides, is coarser. It is, however, by far the best plan to examine all

kinds carefully, for most of the faults are only exaggerations of some right tendency, and may help us to discover new beauties in the more favourably developed plants. Find out some Primroses, then, in a sheltered wood, the place where they flourish best, perhaps growing in damper shade amongst the mossy roots of some old beech, or springing up beneath the hazel-bushes, amongst Violets and White Anemones and the more abundant Dog's Mercury with its small green flowers, from a floor which, with all its green, looks so beautifully dry, and is guarded by an atmosphere of such echoing stillness that we scarcé feel out of doors: at least, these are the situations in which I have found the Primrose finest, but it is often very beautiful on sheltered banks. The flower is of a most unusual colour, a pale delicate yellow slightly tinged with green. And the better flowers impress us by a peculiar

paleness, not dependent upon any feebleness of hue, which we always find unpleasing, but rather upon the exquisite softness of their tone. And we must not overlook the little round stigma, that green and translucent gem, which forms the pupil of the eye, and is surrounded by a deeper circle of orange, which helps it to shine forth more clearly. Many flowers have a somewhat pensive look, but in the pensiveness of the Primrose there is a shade of melancholy—a melancholy, however, which awakens no thought of sadness, and does but give interest to the pale, sweet, inquiring faces which the plant upturns towards us. Now the perfection of softness of colour and the perfection of this pensive expression will scarcely ever be found in the same individual. The largest and softest blossoms are too loose and flagging: we find them in over-nourished plants, and they have sacrificed every-

thing to sensuous qualities, to size, and the perfection of their creamy tone. The best expression must be looked for in a smaller and more compact flower. And it will be noticed that in some Primroses the stigma is apparently a-wanting, because shorter than the stamens, which thus occupy the centre in its place. Now the softness of the eye is mainly dependent on the stigma; but in spite of a little harshness, there is often a strange beauty in these stamen-showing flowers, and I think that the finest expression I have ever met with has been in some of them.

In the Primrose, as a whole, we cannot help being struck by an exceeding softness and delicacy; there is nothing sharp, strong, or incisive; the smell is "the faintest and most ethereal perfume," as Mrs. Stowe has called it in her "Sunny Memories," though she was mistaken in saying that it disappears when we pluck

the flower. I do not mention this mistake in any fault-finding spirit, but to show how needful it is for accurate observers to examine many specimens; individual Primroses are occasionally scentless, but it is merely the result of accident. This softness is very striking, too, in the calyx, with its long, light, tapering fingers, so different from the broad, almost triangular teeth of the loose husky calyx of the Cowslip, this being, in fact, one of the botanical distinctions betwixt the plants. Then look at the leaves, those broad arching tongues, so deeply wrinkled and uneven; their very margins, too, wavy, plaited, and irregularly indented; the teeth, with their sharp, white vein-points, softened by an intervening fringe of down, and tearing out almost into raggedness as they near the footstalk, from which the leaf gradually opens, with something of the outline of a tongue of water, into the flatter,

broadly-rounded tip. You know what I refer to here: the wavy irregular outline which spilt water so often takes when alternately flowing and creeping slowly, and, as it were, tentatively, along the ground. And the more the leaves arch over, the better will the effect of this be seen, in their flowing, careless, easy look, as if they were pouring out of the plant. You will observe the gradual disappearance of the teeth where the leaf flattens out towards its extremity, leaving scarce any irregularity there except from those water-like sinuosities of the outline. It is this which gives the rounded tongue-like aspect, which sometimes in the more down-bent leaves almost suggests an idea of languor, as if they were stretching out athirst for falling rain. Yet the moment the word arises we reject it as inappropriate; and though I have spoken of the teeth disappearing at the end of the leaf, it will be

found that they are really there, but smaller and turned downwards, so as to be out of sight. And yet one thing more has entered into the effect we noticed: if you look at the midrib of the leaf in profile, you will see that towards the end it curves gradually upwards, so that the tip of the leaf is, in a manner, hooded. In fact, the leaf has a double arch. But the upper surface at the end is at times so convex that this curve may be easily overlooked by a careless observer, though in reality it is always there. And the insinuating, often sidelong, bend of the tip of the leaf, which gives half the force of the tongue-like character, depends mainly upon this slight and gradual alteration in the curve.

But what marvellous spell possesses these leaves, so that each of them falls upon the heart with such soft and silent tread; nay, rather say that each seems gifted with a low voice heard in

silence, like that of the last fruit when it drops in autumnal mist upon the dead damp garden path. But the Primrose leaves create the silence in which they speak. It is, perhaps, not mere fancy that Milton's line—

"Bring the rath primrose that forsaken dies"—

is somewhat fitted to express this voice. If I had to find words for it, the letter a, long and short, and th, would seem particularly appropriate. Such words as path, bath, faith. This effect depends chiefly upon the great breadth of the leaf-tongue, and the roundness of their extremities, assisted by other qualities of which we have spoken, by no means forgetting the wrinkling, or the dryness, which we shall presently mention. What a difference between these and other tongue-shaped leaves, as those of the Hart's Tongue Fern!

In many Primroses, then, you will at once be

struck by a certain dryness in the look of the leaf; a dryness like that of an absorbent surface, which would be nothing unusual in Sage or other such parched-up *Labiate*, but which becomes most remarkable when combined with these soft and fleshy textures. And it will sometimes make you at first a little doubtful as to the impression you get from the leaf. Harsh, you might say, but never altogether so, for we cannot help feeling that there is a softness also there, to which the harshness yields, a softness composed of many elements—the dull velvety colour of the leaf which might make you believe it downy, the seeming readiness to bend any way as though it were a piece of cloth, and especially that plaited downy character of the margin to which we have already alluded. Now we can easily find specimens with scarce any trace of harshness, but in many of the best the softness prevails

over the harshness without ever quite effacing it, so that the rough dryness may enter into our conception for a purpose I shall afterwards notice. Contrast these leaves and their soft easy character with the sharp swords of the Iris, or with the leaves and stem in a sprig of spotted Laurel (*Aucuba*), where the lines are amongst the keenest and most delicately forcible that I know; or with the bold decided outlines of the Crown Imperial, whose tall stem rises like a mast through the lower leaves, is thence for a short space bare, till it is topped by the crowning sheaf of leaf swords, out of which droop so gracefully the large yellow wax-like bells. Here every line seems to pierce like an arrow, the composition is so clear and masterly. But we have nothing at all of this kind in the Primrose; it is meant to impress us as altogether soft and yielding. And yet amidst all this softness the decision is only veiled. Let

but those leaves be a little too flat, or wide, or smooth, as they often are in over-nourished specimens, and we shall detect the loss in a moment. Look, too, at the decision in the lines of their arching, as they gush forth like a green fountain from the earth, starting at first more erect from the centre of the plant, and increasing the curve as they lengthen in going outwards, till gradually bent, pushed lower and lower by those which climb above them, they finally, perhaps, touch the ground. The bulk of the leaves, however, point very markedly upwards, being the channels by which wet is conducted to the centre of the plant, so that we may often see them with but little of the bending-over appearance, and they always seem shortened just in time to prevent their running into languidness. Now turn the leaf sideways and note the changed aspect of the margin from thence, still wavy, but more

regular in its festooning, and sharp with emphatic vein-points. How this contrasts with our former view when we were looking at it rather from above!

But one of the most beautiful points in the Primrose is the manner in which the paleness of the flowers is taken up by the herbage. Thus look at that down upon the flower-stalks, which clothes them like a soft thin halo, and seems, when you nearly examine it, to resemble the white silky fibres of that lovely mildew which so often forms on things decaying in close places, a something so delicate and half-transparent you think that it might melt at a touch. Follow it thence to the under surfaces of the leaves, with their white midribs and veins, and see, with the plant at some little distance, what an exquisite softness it produces there, faintly bedimming the already lighter green, and whitening like hoar-

frost when placed in certain aspects. At the down-turned margin of the leaf it stops, and never appears upon the upper surface. Now this paleness seems to hang about the plant like a mystery, for though the leaves of the Primrose may at times show a trace of the steady paleness of the Cowslip, it is more usually confined to their under surfaces, and the white flower-stalks with their clothing of down. And when we are looking at the Primrose, one or other of these downy changeful portions is continually coming into view, so that we get a feeling as if there hung about the whole a clothing of soft evanescent mist, thickening about the centre of the plant, and the under surfaces of the leaves which are less exposed to the sun. And then we reach one of the main expressions of the Primrose. When we look at the pale sweet flowers, and the soft-toned green of the herbage,

softened further here and there by that uncertain mist of down, the dryness of the leaf and fur enters forcibly into our impression of the plant, giving a sense of extreme delicacy and need of shelter, as if it were some gentle creature which skrinks from exposure to the weather.

VII.

THE GLOBE FLOWER.

WHAT is this flower, yellow and pale, and yet so singularly bright, yielding nothing in our May gardens to Iris, Narcissus, or Tulip, and yet springing up wild here and there by streamlets in the rocky dells amongst the mountains of Wales and Cumberland? Wherever we meet with it, it commands our instant homage. Amidst the blaze of gaudy flowers, for all its unpretending dress, none looks of a descent more manifestly noble. And when wild we always feel as though it had strayed from a selected circle. The jolly buttercups and field flowers appear like country folk; it stands among them

all conspicuous like a king. I once saw it in a dell where it had found for itself a little nook of green which the common wild flowers might not enter, and it grew there with white flowers of the grass of Parnassus, the one thing fair enough to stand by its side. Only two or three blossoms were left (for it was late in August) lingering still, bright but very pale as the dawn-belated moon, and the brawling stream spoke hoarsely to them in its passing by. I have often seen the blossoms finer, but they never impressed me more than these did that misty morning. Globe Flower! Why should we not call it Kingcup? A mere buttercup neither needs nor justifies the name.

How interesting it is to watch these broad round blossoms when they open in the spring, first showing themselves of a greener hue, and much the best if dusked over, as so frequently happens, with brown upon the outer petals. And

gradually, day by day, as the flower enlarges, the clear brightness is seen coming through the petals, as the moon through the folds of cloud which overlay her, till at length the full orb shines forth revealed like a very planet in its glory. The Globe Flower never properly expands. The stamens lie concealed within, and we like to know that they are there, but they will scarce be seen till the beauty of the flower is gone. The clear moonlight tint is something like that of the Mimosa, and is one of the most exquisite we know. It makes us think of some strange metal in which gold and silver are combined, and there is further a metallic cast about the plant which enforces this suggestion—a peculiar hue, and a smoothness in the stems and leaf-stalks as we slip them through our fingers, like the smoothness of a brazen wire. All this fits in admirably with the dark green leaves and cool poisonous habit of the

Ranunculaceæ. The strength of the Globe Flower accordingly lies in the impressive brightness, the large size and peculiar form of the blossom, and in the general smoothness and compactness, and the darkness and keenness of the leaves. Nothing about it looks common from the first moment of its issuing from the ground. And see how peculiarly those leaves are dotted in the angles for emphasis. We find the same thing in the Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), with which the Globe Flower may be advantageously compared. But the white dots in the Buttercup are changes in the colour of the leaf, whilst those of the Globe Flower are little translucent spaces in the angles of the margin.

VIII.

THE BLACKTHORN, OR SLOE.

IT bursts upon us suddenly in the leafless hedges of March, whitening them here and there like showers of scattered spray. How beautiful, but how very frail! We take a piece home, and almost immediately it drops. In another day or two we pass the same way again, and the parent bloom is also gone, defaced and half scattered to the wind. The Blackthorn seems but made for a passing glance, put together slightly and carelessly, as if Nature had thrown us in the uncertain season of spring a little foretaste of the summer loveliness she is preparing, just as she cheers us now and then with a bright, still, sunny day. As we go on towards summer, fruit blossoms become

compact and more finished. There is a great advance from the plum to the pear and apple; and there is just the same from the Sloe to the Hawthorn. The Hawthorn first clothes itself in full array of green, and then puts its blossoms forth, loading its branches with the fragrant snow, till the long lines of distant hedge seem like billows tumbling over into foam. And when we break off a branch how lovely the blossoms are, each with its rounded petals—a little ring of pearls, and lovely most of all, the half-opened buds, which shine in the light like little balls of silver. And then that sweet and hay-resembling fragrance, what delightful thoughts does it recall of May days in the past! But what a difference between the Hawthorn and the Sloe! In this last, the flowers are irregularly scattered, instead of being bound up into these dense, well-compacted corymbs of the Hawthorn blossom. The smell is

faint, bitter, and disagreeable; and there is a comparative harshness in the stamens and centre of the blossom. The anthers soon burst, and then all beauty disappears, for the stamens look loose and disorderly. But the most important difference lies in the configuration of the petals. The Hawthorn blossoms have a compactly-rounded make, and the petals of each flower are individually round and hollow, and are set in the ring as accurately as gems in a bracelet. Yet at the same time there is a crisped, unfinished look about their edges which we always like to see, a specimen of that easy carelessness of execution which delights us in a sketch by the hand of some great master. Trace this from the opening buds, where even from the first appearance of the white we find the edge of the petal curling back, and rippling up into a crest, giving force to the bud by raising the lines which mark the disposition of its contents. In-

stances of such carelessness and want of precision and symmetry abound in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, but we do not find them in the mineral. Thus the two sides of the human face are never quite alike, and there are a thousand similar lesser differences to be observed; but there is undeviating regularity in the most unsymmetrical of crystals. We have already likened the Hawthorn flowers to a little ring of pearls. And many things concur very beautifully in creating this resemblance. Each of the petals is remarkably round. There is no sort of claw, nor any of the usual tapering towards the point of insertion; and the petals scarcely at all overlap each other, so that they look like pearls set side by side. And the circularity of each is more distinctly seen by reason of the cup-like hollowness, which holds a little shadow at the bottom, with light playing round it in resemblance of the lustre of a pearl.

And now, if we look once more at that crisped

everted petal edge, we shall better understand its meaning. If clear and sharp it would not only be much less piquant, but would give the flowers, from the causes we have just been considering, too regular and artificial an aspect. It now detains the eye sensibly in passing round the margin, preventing any possible harshness of force, while it adds to the pearly delicacy of the colour by chasing it with shadows. This crisping, if I remember right, is scarcely noticeable in the petals of the Scarlet Hawthorn, where the colour would not require it. And finally, this crisping guides the eye right to the insertion of the petals, so that their roundness shall be most fully felt. Everything about the Hawthorn looks clear, transparent, and full of light. The petals of the Sloe are very different—their roundness inclines somewhat more to the oval, and their opaquer white is well calculated for effect upon the darker leafless branches.

IX.

THE POET'S NARCISSUS.

EVERYBODY knows the Poet's Narcissus, which is sold so extensively in the London streets in May, and which is, I believe, especially cultivated for the purpose. Take a few fully expanded blossoms, for those too young will only disappoint you, and look at them from a little distance, in such a position that the reflected may be helped by a little transmitted light. First, then, what a purity and softness in the colour! Not a veiny white as you are now looking at it, but cool and snowy, and as soft as milk, dimpled everywhere into gradations by the exquisite curvature of the petals. These are large and

bend back, to give round expanse to the whiteness, so that the effect of it may be fully felt. The flower is fixed upon a long stout tube, cylindrical and green. And mark how it spreads from the end of this as from a centre. There is first the little red-fringed cup, yellow within, but green in the deepest part of it. And see how this continues the tube through the flower, and how its torn edges seem to radiate, and how its concavity opposes the broad convexity of the flower face. Then how beautifully the petals bend back from it, folding upon themselves in those delicious curves, so as to lay marked emphasis upon the central line, and each of them tipped at the extremity with a small point (*mucro*).

But wherein lies the special attractiveness of this Narcissus? Is it not in the exquisite way in which cold and heat are brought together

there, the former of course predominating;—in the blending of that scarlet fire and rich delicious fragrance—all fragrance, as I have said, being indicative of warmth—with the snowy coolness and purity? Such union of opposite and apparently incompatible beauties is always intensely pleasurable. We experience this in looking at the snow on Alpine heights, whilst we ourselves lie warm in the summer heart of the valley. And the red of the Narcissus is specially delightful, because it is such a mere streak, and is yet so brilliantly contrasted by the snow around it, and is so well supported on the other hand by the yellow and green within. We care greatly more for a little red on white than for white on an expanse of redness.

In its general expression the Narcissus seems a type of maiden purity and beauty, yet warmed by a love-breathing fragrance. And then what

innocence in the large soft eye, which few can rival amongst the whole tribe of flowers. The narrow yet vivid fringe of red, so clearly seen amidst the whiteness, suggests again the idea of purity enshrining passion—purity with a heart which can kindle into fire. The leaves of this Narcissus are less finished than those of the Daffodil, so that the whole attention is concentrated upon the flower. Yet their tint affords a good support for the blossom. And we may observe that the Narcissus is one of those few flowers which improve with age, the petals seeming to get larger, and the expression of the eye softer, till the blossom absolutely withers. The effect of the eye is best seen by transmitted light. Put a few flowers in the window, and look at them as you sit in the room.

X.

THE SNOWFLAKE.

(*Leucojum Æstivum.*)

THE Snowflake is closely related to the Snowdrop, and is very similar in structure, but its parts are, on the whole, less delicately fashioned. It is, in fact, the Snowdrop on a larger scale, as if intended for more sensuous effect, with greater breadth and fulness therefore, and colours more decidedly contrasted. Look at the blossom, that little shower of bells, perhaps five or six or more in number, all white and pure as the driven snow, and bent into a sort of pyramidal fall, of which the uppermost is top. Each flower is a broad seal-like mass of white, more impressively white

than in the Snowdrop. And we can easily perceive the reason. In the first place, on account of the vivid contrast of the leaves, which are not glaucous as the Snowdrop's, but are bright deep green. In the next place, because the shape of the corolla has been entirely changed, made shorter, and more widely bell-shaped, so as to get the utmost possible expanse of colour, and impress us as a globe or seal of white, just green-touched at the edges for relief. And the petals are now all white and similar. In the Snowdrop there was a clear distinction. There, only the three outermost were truly white; and these were longer, and were of softer and lighter make, having a varied outline of indescribable beauty, as graceful as that of a sea-shell. The three innermost and shorter lay within the others, united into a stout conical cup, the most visible part of which was green. Now in the Snowflake, these innermost

petals, which are white, as we have already stated, are thrown into the circumference with the others, so as to fill it out to the utmost. And hence a marked change in the interior of the flower. The stamens have wider space afforded them, and produce a most lovely effect in connection with the delicate veining of the petals. And if you invert the flower, you will find that the unnatural posture spoils its beauty less than in the Snowdrop. Now this shows a form less specialised, less adapted, that is, to one particular set of circumstances, and so perhaps indicates a lower kind of beauty. Evidently, at any rate, this sensuous gain of the Snowflake in the broad contrast of green and white has necessitated a certain loss. The delicacy of outline in the corolla of the Snowdrop is gone, to be replaced by a simple bell-shape, only varied near the margin where the petal-tips curve outwards. But if the plant has

lost in delicacy, it has gained in other ways. The whole cast of it strikes us as pre-eminently fair and noble. We feel this especially in the tallness of the stems and leaves, which show a most graceful example of well-proportioned height; and, also, in the dropping of the large snowy flowers, in which there is less of humility than of the subdued yet dignified bearing of some tall and beautiful princess of olden days when standing in the presence of a king.

Here sensuousness, then, has a high imaginative value. It is in great part the very purity of the white which makes the plant so noble. The form of the pedicels is, in the main, like what we have in the Snowdrop, but the bend is less absolutely determined. There is a tendency to relax into something of that arching curve, which in the Snowdrop but evinces weakness. Yet how beautiful do we find it here; the uppermost

pedicel straight and more sudden in the bend, the lower ones starting off of necessity at sharper angles, and arching more and more perceptibly as we descend to the lowermost. The spathe has but little of the Snowdrop curve, but the pedicels look stiff and weak if it is cut away. And now we see the force of the bell-shape of the corolla, for the petals of the Snowdrop would be far too lengthy. So that the corolla has been shortened, in the first place, to get a fuller and rounder mass of colour, and we now find besides that the shortening of both corolla and spathe is equally necessary to fit them for the height to which they have been elevated.

We have already noticed the deep green colour of the leaves. These are very long, and in their upper portion look singularly flat and strap-like, with a broad round point which seems cut off abruptly, nay, is absolutely notched in the

middle. And this flatness and bluntness are taken, as usual, up by other parts of the plant. The stalk on which the flowers are mounted is not round, as we saw it in the Snowdrop, for roundness would be unimpressive with such length. Broadly two-edged, we might almost say triangular, it contracts below the spathe into a slender wrist-like joint. But still it needs emphasis to make it sufficiently effective. And consequently the stem as it ascends is *twisted*, to prevent the flat side from falling too dead upon the eye. So the edges, ridged with their slight shallow teeth, cut upon us most keenly and decidedly, and the flatness rises up to terminate in the blunt flat-sided spathe, which swells out again above the joint, almost as might a human limb. Find a Snowflake stem which has not this twist and note the difference. Lastly, this twisting of the stem gives it the tapering look

54921

that makes its great length seem so well proportioned. View the stem in certain aspects, more especially, I think, from behind, and this will be seen most beautifully. Then take the stem and go round it, and you will find that the tapering is less than it had seemed, because the effect was partly produced by the twist, as we have already said.

XI.

THE WHITE LILY.

BEN JONSON calls the White Lily "the plant and flower of light." Why? Because of its whiteness, says Leigh Hunt, in his "Imagination and Fancy;" also because "there is a golden dawn issuing out of the White Lily in the rich yellow of the stamens." Yes, but is not Jonson also thinking of that silvery glistening of the petals, which makes them seem almost to shine with a light of their own? No darkening shade, no trace of richer tinting—those large queenly flowers seem wholly compact of a lustrous, dazzling whiteness, which gains warmth from the stamens with their rich orange glow. And all the rest of the

plant is in perfect harmony with the flowers. The foliage, remarkably little stained or insect bitten, has even in June the glossy, vivid green which we deem peculiar to the spring, and often through all the time of flowering it is bespotted here and there with little scarlet lady-birds, whose bright tints add most conspicuously to the beauty of the plant, and seem absolutely to belong to it. I do not know what they are doing there,—probably in search of insects or of other food,—but they furnish in their scarlet and black the very colour that is needed to set off the green by contrast. The plant is almost incomplete without them. I wonder if they are attached to it in its native country.

XII.

THE DAFFODIL.

IN the Snowdrop, Snowflake, and many similar plants, the spathe or sheath out of which the flower arises has a fresh leafy aspect, and shows no symptom of decay till the plant has shed its blossom. Again, in the Calla, or Arum Lily of the greenhouses, and our own native Cuckoo-Pint (*Arum maculatum*), this spathe is so largely developed as to constitute the most striking beauty of the flower. Now there are certain kinds of Narcissus, as the Daffodil and Poet's Narcissus (popularly called "Pheasant's Eye"), which seem meant to attract us by an especial freshness. In the Daffodil, for instance, the leaves and stem are of a

full glaucous green, a colour not only cool and refreshing in itself, but strongly suggestive of water, the most apparent source of freshness, and constituting a most delicious groundwork for the bright, lively yellow of the blossoms. Now what sort of spathe would be likely to contribute best to this remarkable effect of the flower? Should the colours be unusually striking, or the size increased, or what? Strange to say, in both Daffodil and Pheasant's Eye we find the spathe dry and withered, shrivelled up like a bit of thin brown paper, and clinging round the base of the flower. We cannot overlook it, and most assuredly we were never meant to do so. Nothing could have been more beautifully ordered than this contrast, there being just sufficient suggestion of the dead, the artificial, to make us appreciate more fully that abounding freshness and life. And we are not impressed as by any

ordinary form of decay. Imagine the spathe unwithered, as we elsewhere often find it, and see what we should lose.* Now withering is generally meant to remind us of the perishableness and transitory nature of things; but we do occasionally see it, as in the present instance, employed in one of its least attractive aspects—to intensify the feeling of freshness by the contrast. For other illustrations of this, look at the young spring leaves when rising in the ditches among last year's withered stalks, or at the green shoot as it bursts through the dry coating of a bulb, like that of the Crocus, or of some Irises and onions.

I said that the Daffodil leaves, especially in their colour, are strongly suggestive of water, the source and type of coolness and freshness. But these leaves are not the colour of ordinary water,

* A withered spathe is by no means peculiar to these plants, but its object in them is remarkably clear.

nor yet do they recall it in its coolest possible tones. What is the reason of this? In the first place, it may be answered that the blue-green of the flower is one of the most beautiful of all the characteristic cool tones that water is capable of assuming. But there is a second and still more important reason. The blue-green colour of water is that in which leaves are best capable of imitating it to advantage. The colourless tones of water are less beautiful, and are not easily made compatible with any but mineral forms of structure. It is true that we find clear beads on the leaves of the Ice-plant, and that there is brilliancy in the eye of animals. But these are rare instances, and even here the imitation is of water in the solid form. Glaucous green, on the contrary, is just the very tint which water possesses characteristically in common with the vegetable world, and has the further advan-

tage of being cool and shadowy to the utmost degree that is compatible with the appearance of an active vegetable life. And let it be observed that there are other points in the Daffodil which contribute to assist the suggestion we have indicated, such as the softness and juiciness of its textures, and the smooth, uniform, striped appearance which arises from the straightness of its long narrow leaves.* All these combine to give us a sort of natural symbolism. We may almost say that these leaves are symbolical of water, representing as they do its delicious coolness, its smooth uniformity of surface, and the power which it has of becoming deep blue-green.

* This striped appearance will be easily understood if we look at a cluster of Daffodils a little distance away from us. Near at hand the same effect is carried out by the parallel veining, and other characteristics I have mentioned. The imagination blends both effects together when we form our conception of the plant.

Before proceeding further, let us try to get at the exact meaning of the term freshness. Freshness then is simply lifefulness, or the outward expression or manifestation of activity or vital power. Consequently whatever seems immediately to restore lost strength we call refreshing. Thus we speak of a giant refreshed with wine, or of a man who eats and is refreshed. Still the term is most generally associated with the idea of cold; and as cold depresses vitality, whilst heat is necessary to maintain it, this may at first sight seem strange. But we only call a cool breeze more refreshing than a warm one because the former braces and exhilarates, whilst the latter is more apt to depress us. At all times warmth, and especially the warmth of a fire, seems to give increase of comfort rather than of power and disposition for bodily exertion. If we were frozen that heat might restore us to life, but not to an active life;

we should feel for a time that our strength and energy were gone. And practically we find it unsafe to approach a fire when we are very cold; the restoration of warmth by such means is always painful, and it would be certain destruction to a frozen limb.

Now to apply this definition. The freshest-looking plants are those which have the most marked external signs of active and energetic life. Much moisture, with a certain proportion of light and warmth, are the ordinary conditions of this, and hence comes the freshness of our own spring season, and of the colder temperate zone as a whole, as well as that of the tropics after the falling of those heavy rains which are necessary to maintain the balance against a sun of such tremendous power. Freshness is generally most marked where vital activity is strongest, viz., in soft, succulent, fast-growing

tissues filled with abundant sap, and principally, therefore, in the younger parts of vegetables, after these have been sufficiently sunned to give them a look of bright and joyous health. Wrinkled, stiff-leaved, spinous, or woody plants, on the other hand, are characteristic of hot dry places, and we feel them to be but half alive, however rapidly they grow. Indeed, as a rule, they do not grow rapidly. Evergreens are remarkably slow: the common Box is a very type of slowness, whence its frequent use in our older gardens for edgings.

Now freshness is displayed by each different part of a plant after its own peculiar manner. Leaves, for instance, have but little capability for expressing sun-power. They may be regarded as the shady portion of the plant; their very place is to be cool, a ground upon which to display the blossoms. They rarely assume warm

tints, except in the autumnal withering of the trees — perhaps an acknowledgment that too much colour is incompatible with the condition of their healthy existence. But green, the characteristic leaf tint, requires little sun for its development. It is the tint of mosses, ferns, and the least organised plants in general, of the early spring, and of the cooler temperate zone. And the green parts of plants are generally the first to be seen, the flowers requiring more sun-power to awaken them.

The flower is the light of a plant, just as leaves may be considered as its shade. This light may be a blue and cool one; it may even be found, as in some Pansies, nearly approaching blackness; but still it has a vividness, a stimulating power, far exceeding that of the green, which is the most restful tint we know, and it generally expresses sun-force in responsive

vividness of hue, in splendour and glow of colour, in that higher and more glorious force of freshness which is too much for the leaves to bear.* Green petals we seldom like to see. They betoken a comparatively low type, and are often associated with poisonous and suspicious qualities, especially when found amongst the more highly-developed flowers. The beauty we expect of petals is to be expressed in brighter tones, dull tones like black or brown being extremely rare.

We shall now be better able to understand the freshness of the Daffodil. It is a plant which affords a most beautiful contrast, a cool, watery sheet of leaves, with bright warm flowers, yellow and orange, dancing over the leaves like meteors over a marsh. The leaves look full of

* It is well to remind the unscientific reader that the whole fruit and flower of a plant are essentially nothing but an assemblage of leaves undergoing a higher development.

watery sap, which is the life-blood of plants, and prime source of all their freshness, just as the tissues of a healthy child look plump and rosy from the warm blood circulating within. And this helps the leaves in symbolising water in the way which has been already partially explained. In the first place, they in some degree represent water, and make upon us to some extent the cool delicious impression of actual water; and, in the second place, they make us feel instinctively, as by the signs of some universal language, that water is not far distant. We are led to think of it in a dim, ideal way, not as it actually exists, with all sorts of inconveniences, as of mud and muddy borders, but in its purity and life-giving freshness. Something of the same expression, though in a less degree, may be found in the leaves of *Corydalis bulbosa*, or in those of the common Columbine.

PART II.

GARDENS.

I.

FAULTS IN GARDENING.

THE pleasure we receive from flowers may be divided into sensuous and non-sensuous. There is a certain enjoyment felt in richness and variety of colour, in shape and smell, in juiciness, wiriness, softness, hardness, sharpness—looking at these qualities for their own sake merely. The scent of the Rose is delicious, even on a handkerchief, and altogether independently of its connection with the flower; and the blue of the Larkspur would charm us on the painter's palette. But so far we please nothing but the sense, we stop at the outside; the plant is no more than a bundle of qualities. For true appreciation we

must advance beyond this, and think of the plant as a living being—a friend whom we may love, and whose character must be intimately known. We shall wish to learn all we can of it, the time of its appearance and flowering, what it does with itself in the winter, whether dropping its leaves and standing bare-branched like a tree or shrub, or disappearing beneath the ground like a Snowdrop or Hyacinth, or facing the cold with a tuft of leaves lying close upon the earth like a Foxglove. What sort of locality does it love—field, rock, or marsh? How does it treat other plants when it encounters them? Does it twine round them like a Convolvulus, creep over them like many trailing plants, or bear itself erect like the Buttercup? How does it wither? shabbily and untidily like the Pansy, or in the neat, decorous mode of the Gentianella? These and all other facts which we can learn about a

plant have a value in an imaginative point of view; they tell us something about it, and so enable us to understand it, to read its true meaning and character. And we find that the sensuous qualities have more than a sensuous value, for the imagination discovers that they are but a symbolic language, which we must receive as exponent of the hidden nature of a flower, just as the features of the human countenance are interpreters of the mind within.

Now the faults of gardening, against which my present paper is directed, all centre in this one thing—the constant subjection of the imaginative, or higher, to the sensuous, or lower, element of flower beauty. We will trace this, first, in the general arrangement of gardens and of flowers in relation to each other, and afterwards in the case of their individual culture. To begin, then, we find flower-beds habitually considered too

much as mere masses of colour, instead of as an assemblage of living beings. The only thought is to delight the eye by the utmost possible splendour. When we walk in our public gardens everything seems tending to distract the attention from the separate plants, and to make us look at them only with regard to their united effect. And this universal brilliancy, this striking effect of the masses, is the acknowledged chief aim of the cultivator. Speaking of the older gardens, Mr. C. McIntosh says: "No doubt that ten out of every twelve sorts of annuals thus grown were useless trash, weedy in appearance, and producing none of those brilliant effects for which our modern flower gardens are so conspicuous; and the same may be said of the perennial plants existing in those days. . . . Gardeners of the days to which we refer had little idea of producing pleasing and agreeable effects by means of

masses of colour either harmoniously or contrastedly arranged. Their great aim was to possess a collection of species and genera, without much regard to the beauty of individuals, or the effect which they were capable of producing." ("Book of the Garden," vol. ii. p. 815.) Now I quite admit that the older system may have been a little at fault in the respects here mentioned, but we of the present day are running to exactly the opposite extreme. And whilst the old faults were of a purely negative kind, which did little if any mischief, the faults of our modern system are eminently calculated to vitiate the public taste.

Has any of our readers, gifted with real love for flowers, ever walked through one of those older gardens, and observed the wide difference in its effect? I am not here speaking necessarily of the grounds of a mansion, but merely of such

a garden as might often be found, some twenty years ago, attached to any good-sized house in a country town or village. Or even a little cottage plot of the kind so beautifully described by Clare will, to some extent, illustrate my meaning:—

"And where the marjoram once, and sage and rue,
And balm and mint, with curled-leaf parsley grew,
And double marigolds, and silver thyme,
And pumpkins 'neath the window used to climb;
And where I often, when a child, for hours
Tried through the pales to get the tempting flowers;
As lady's laces, everlasting peas,
True-love lies bleeding, with the hearts at ease;
And golden rods, and tansy running high,
That o'er the pale top smiled on passer-by;
Flowers in my time which every one would praise,
Though thrown like weeds from gardens now-a-days."

There might be, as Mr. McIntosh says, but little attempt at colour grouping, or at the production of effect by masses in a narrow sense.

But was there any want of beauty there? And did you not feel, in looking at those flowers, how each made you love it as a friend—the Pinks and Sweet Williams, the Everlasting Peas, Valerian, Day Lily, Jacob's Ladder, and a host of others? And did you not notice how ever and again you fell upon some quaint strange plant which has been expelled from the modern border, which seemed to touch your inmost soul, and to fill the mind, especially if in childhood, with a sense of wonder and mysterious awe? What was that plant? Could not anybody tell its name, and where it came from, and all else about it, for it must surely have an eventful history? And with curiosity rather stimulated than satisfied by the scanty knowledge you could glean, you fell back upon the imagination, which set it down as an actor in some strange and awful tale, as that of a young man who gathered some unknown wild

flowers that attracted him, and who, together with his betrothed, was poisoned by their touch. Feelings of this sort were strongly awakened in my mind in childhood by such plants as Caper Spurge, Henbane, Rue, and other more beautiful species, as the Dog's-Tooth Violet, with its spotted leaves, the common Nigella, and the pink Marsh-Mallow of the fields.

Want of general effect! Is there none in those cottage gardens, where the Nasturtiums twine lovingly all the summer amongst Jasmine, Clematis, and thickly-trellised Rose—where the towering splendour of the Hollyhocks is confronted by the broad discs of the Sunflower, and where the huge leaves, herbs, and fruit trees of the kitchen garden run close up on or intermix with the border flowers, amongst which we may meet at any time with some new or long-absent friend? Here are no masses of colour in the modern

sense; but do you ever feel the want of them? Or can you turn from these simple plots, unstudied for effect, to the showy, unvaried brilliancy of the modern border, and find that you miss nothing there? Do not the plants seem comparatively wanting in interest? Do they not seem to be individually less dear, to hold you with a lighter grasp? Now what can be the reason of this? The old gardeners, we are told, thought little of beauty, and chiefly of genera and species. Why, then, should the poet find that, with all its faults, the old garden stirs him in those depths which the modern one can seldom reach? This defect is far less conspicuous in the larger hothouses and greenhouses, and I am convinced that it depends almost wholly on false principles of arrangement. We should feel a great difference if we saw the plants grow wild. I will give an illustration of this. Every-

body knows the little blue annual Lobelia. It is a pretty flower, but, as the gardeners place it in their show-beds, it seems as cold and unlovable as if it was wrought out of steel. Yet should we ever think it so if we found it rising stem by stem amongst the looser grass, in such meadows as the Harebell, Milkwort, or Eyebright (*Euphrasia*) will often enter, or perhaps in closer tufts on open banks of gravel? I have chosen localities altogether imaginary, and am, of course, well aware that the plant's colours are too bright to associate easily with the tints of our native flowers.

But is it not right in a public garden to seek after brilliant display? Is not that just the very place for it? Yes, if the brilliancy be of a proper kind. The fault I attack lies in concentrating our attention too much upon effects of one special class, produced by the bright colours of a crowded assemblage of plants, all prim,

compact, and of a low habit of growth. When we turn from these show-beds, how often we find there are no other flowers in the garden which possess any lively interest! There are sure to be evergreens in abundance, but summer is no time for them. If we followed Nature, we should scorn so much formal neatness, spreading often over so large a space of ground, and should cultivate a more noble splendour, with proper variety and repose. The plants would then be more intermixed, as we see them in the rustic garden, and we should love them as we love them there. Beds of the present sort, when permitted at all, would then lead off into surrounding beds less uniformly gay, but stocked with a sufficiency of handsome perennials and flowering shrubs; and every here and there would be some curious plants like Mullein, Sunflower, Acanthus, Southernwood, or perhaps some giant Umbellifer,

or many other species with lovely blossoms, but which are of the class now stigmatised as weedy. The choice, of course, would vary with the character of the bed. Everything of this kind, however, our taste is fast driving from us. We banish whatever is not striking in colour and will not conform to our rule. On our side beds, where shrubs are intermixed, we look at the neat compact Thujas and Junipers, the Scarlet Geraniums and Blue Lobelias, with the purple foliage of the Perilla, amongst which the chance appearances of a Deadly Nightshade or a Physalis (Winter Cherry) would seem like water in a desert. What gardens ought to be is perhaps best seen in those which are specially devoted to botanical purposes.

But worst of all is the neglect of the early spring plants. Every one begins to value flowers in spring; we notice them more particularly from their being so few, and they cheer us by

their contrast with the winter, and by that cool delicious freshness which no other season can bestow. There arises, then, even for the world-worn man, a sort of second childhood,—the film is half fallen from his eyes; but where will he see those flowers which, if any can, might win him back to Nature? Anemone, Dog's-Tooth Violet, Pasque Flower, Yellow Adonis, Hepatica, Gentianella, and the lesser Fritillaries—what beauty can be matched with theirs? Yet how rarely do they seem to come before us now!

My chief accusation then is, that gardeners are teaching us to think too little about the plants individually, and to look at them chiefly as an assemblage of beautiful colours. It is difficult in those blooming masses to separate one from another; all produce so much the same sort of impression. The consequence is, people see the flowers on the beds without caring to know any-

thing about them, or even to ask their names. It was different in the older gardens, because there was just variety there, the plants strongly contrasted with each other, and we were ever passing from the beautiful to the curious. Now we get little of quaintness or mystery, or of the strange delicious thought of being lost and embosomed in a tall, rich wood of flowers. All is clear, definite, and classical—the work of a too narrow and exclusive taste, as was that of Pope and other writers of his school.* Compare this

* By far the most natural mode of arrangement is that which permits a greater or less intermixture of fruit trees, vegetables, and flowers. We freely grant that this intermixture will not always be possible, but we are convinced that it might generally be effected to a much greater extent than at present. Apple-trees, for instance, might easily be planted on many of our lawns and flower-beds. But, unfortunately, our private gardens in all respects too closely imitate the public ones. Some of the faults we are discussing are comparatively venial in the latter, whilst in the former they are highly mischievous.

with the work of Nature when she produces a striking effect, as in the South American forests. The magnificence of these is too much for a poetic mind. It is something absolutely bewildering and embarrassing, and yet just a dim hint of what God could show us if He opened the full treasures of his splendour; but here there is endless variety, the most diverse forms of beauty side by side with every description of strange, uncouth, enormous growth—Cactus, Palm, and Plantain—bound together with rope-like Lianas, and Orchids everywhere bursting out upon the trees. Consequently the effect is right; we are not tempted to lose sight of the individuals in the masses, though bewildered by the multitude of their claims. And there is the same variety in some of the Rhododendron-covered uplands of Switzerland, whose effect in its kind more nearly resembles what our gardeners desire.

This constant revelling in a blaze of colour, without any proper relief, begets an indifference to the simple wild flowers, which seem tame and insipid to eyes that have been injured by excessive stimulus. Now none can have a healthy love for flowers unless he loves the wild ones. In a garden the plants are kept in well-behaved restraint, but we must watch their ways when they are wholly free, when each can choose the home it fancies best, and root and wrestle for existence there, disposing of its flowers and branches with the utmost possible carelessness of all other interests than its own, yet somehow producing an effect of almost perfect harmony and peace. And under no circumstances need our wild flowers seem insipid to eyes that are rightly trained. I had a Foxglove on the table last summer whose bells were dropping, when there came in a little bunch of Geraniums and other greenhouse plants.

My first thought was, "How the poor Foxglove is killed by the comparison!" But even as I said it there appeared such delicacy of tinting in the spotted markings within the bells, that the Geraniums for a time shrank back abashed.

And the false treatment of gardeners, old and new, being here alike in fault, has actually resulted in making some plants unpopular. We often hear people complaining of the Tulip as a stiff, ungainly flower; but it only looks so when cultivated quite out of its natural appearance, and planted in formal rows with stems as stiff as ramrods. Lay aside the false criteria of excellence, and scatter the flowers here and there by twos and threes, or even in greater numbers, and you will no longer complain of their want of beauty, or be troubled at their speedy fading. The leaves will be a delightful object to watch from February to May. But people will not see the beauty of scattered

plants. I remember looking at a show of highly-cultivated Tulips, and contrasting it with two flowers altogether untrained, which stood upon the open bed of a garden little better than a wilderness. One of the flowers was yellow, and the other a deep rich red; and the sun shining through the latter gave it a transparency which made it glow like wine. I would sooner have had those two neglected flowers than all the exhibition.

But there is a second way, more important even than the last, in which the modern system tends to injure a healthy taste for flowers—I allude to the custom of putting out plants in the beds just for the period of bloom, and then removing them, as if both before and after flowering they were destitute of interest. A garden is, in fact, no longer the home of plants, where all ages, the young, the mature, and the decayed, mix

freely and in easy dress. It has degenerated into a mere assembly-room for brilliant parties, where childhood and age are both alike out of place. In some gardens the system is carried out plainly and unaffectedly. There are no spring flowers at all worth mentioning, but sufficiency of shrubs and evergreens to make the place look neat; and we see the main space occupied by large bare beds, which will receive the summer visitors when they come. About the beginning of May, these half-hardy plants are put in, and miserably uninteresting they look for a while, till at length they burst into their few months' splendour, to be finally swept away in mass by the early frosts. Other gardeners have a little more care for spring. There is a show of Hyacinths and bulbous plants, but they have manifestly been newly set, and are removed at once when they have ceased to flower. By newly set I mean

either planted at the close of autumn, or in pots at the time when they happen to be in bloom.

Now the natural course is for people to delight in loving and cherishing plants from their earliest youth, and in tracing their slow progress into age. Nothing can be more pleasurable than this. At the commencement of the year we see the green tips of the Snowdrops and Crocuses, then those of the Daffodils appear, then some fine morning, unexpectedly, as we enter the garden, a Golden Aconite has lifted its face from a cluster of buds still down-bent, and given us cheerful greeting, coming, perhaps, just where we had least expected it—from some bed where we had forgotten that it grew. Then day after day we watch the slow unfolding buds of the trees, and the progress of each separate plant, as if it were our own child, till at length the latest have put forth their blossoms; and then tenderly and

reverently we stand beside them as they wither, and observe how they yield, some speedily, some slowly, to the force of the increasing cold. In this healthy natural way of garden-keeping there is far less thought of splendour. The plants on a bed are not all in bloom together, but spring and summer flowers are everywhere intermixed. Whilst looking at some early blossom, we enjoy the contrast of its more tardy neighbours, beautiful exceedingly now in the first freshness of their budding foliage, and promising far higher glories in two or three months' time. The bed does not display all its treasures at once, or we should rather say that our undazzled eyes can here perceive the high value of plants which are not in bloom; the whole garden seems one loud voice of exultant hope: "Take this now, and see besides what a rich bank there is to draw upon for the future."

But far different is the procedure in the modern garden. Everything tends to prevent us from considering the plant as a living and growing thing. A living plant fastens firmly upon the soil, and evidently belongs to it; makes itself a place, and alters everything near; forbids the approach of some weaker neighbour, and encounters the thrust of some stronger one in its turn. When plants are made movable their personality is half destroyed, and by confining attention to them exclusively at the time of flowering, we complete the mischief. The plant is never old, never young; in fact, it degenerates from a plant into a coloured ornament. Look at a Scarlet Geranium as you sometimes see it in a greenhouse, with long woody stems continuing from year to year; it may be somewhat untidy, but it can make you love it, and can well bear comparison in this respect with the more brilliant

offslips of the border. And cannot you see how in these show-beds all hope is taken away? If covered with spring flowers, these are all in bloom together. Of course we *know* that there are summer flowers to follow, but they do not stand full of radiant promise amongst the earlier ones, to please us by the contrast. They have not yet been put in. How hopeless and artificial, how unlike Nature, is all this!—Nature, which keeps us in perpetual expectation, in literally unbroken round, from year's beginning to year's end. I do not say that every show-bed is wrong; but, generally speaking, it *is* wrong to gather all beauty into one particular time or place; and, above all, the spring flowers, *as a whole*, should be well scattered and intermixed with the summer plants, or we can never learn to love them as we ought. As to general effect, I would not have it neglected, but sought after in its noblest pos-

sible kind. I am only contending that justice to the whole effect of a bed or garden, instead of being incompatible with, is absolutely inseparable from, justice to the individual flowers.

The third fault of gardening—the too obvious use of mechanical contrivances, and other artificial interferences with the free development of the plant—is less the characteristic danger of our day. In many cases artificial helps are indispensable. It is unquestionably right to try to make flowers assume the best possible shapes, and if these are unattainable without such helps, the helps cannot always be objected to. A certain degree of constraint in the appearance of our gardens is absolutely necessary from the sort of plants we delight in—the half-hardies and evergreens. The freedom and apparent carlessness,—which would be good in better-assorted gardens, would here look slovenly and untidy. The beauty

our cultivators prize is that of neatness and compactness. Nature gives us this in spring—the very season when we are most careless about our grounds—and we try to produce it in the summer-time, which was intended for a looser and freer growth. It is scarcely needful to dwell longer on this head. There are people even now so unfeeling as to clip their trees into the form of fountains and peacocks, and we sometimes see a bed of much-prized flowers so embarrassed with pots, hoops, sticks, and matting, that our interest in the flowers is destroyed—they seem like the inmates of a prison. But most people see the wrong of this, and the favourite flowers of the day are hardly of the kind which need it. It is singular how little a highly artificial treatment of certain plants will displease us, where things grow freely as a whole. In a well-stocked kitchen garden how little we are annoyed by the fantastic

shapes into which fruit trees are often cut; we pass them over like an ill-shaped tree or unsightly fence in the open country, amid the fulness of unembarrassed life. And the forms of the kitchen vegetables—rhubarb, asparagus, and cabbage—are generally so magnificent.

Lastly, we come to the arrangement of flowers after they have been cut. Of course, all arrangements are bad which destroy the general character and expression of a flower for the sake of some particular quality. Many people seem to think that they have nothing to do but to place flowers so that their colours will look nice. We often see little nosegays with Fuchsia bells pulled off and stuck in upright—that is to say, upside downwards. Now any one who really cares about Fuchsias cannot help being annoyed at this. His eye necessarily rests upon the long, unmeaning stigma—unmeaning now, but so beau-

tiful in its natural posture, where it carries off the flower-droop, and prevents it from being cut off too suddenly and abruptly by the straight wide margin of the cup. But the arranger heeds nothing of this. He has the colour he requires—for I suppose him to have an eye for colour—and that is sufficient. I have seen people do just the same with the splendid blossom of the Horse Chestnut. When that tree comes into flower, there is often a very sudden curve in the shoots of the lower branches, which makes it extremely difficult to fix the shoot in water, without either tilting the end of the stalk out of the water, or bending the blossoms to one side. Now many will get rid of the difficulty by deliberately turning the shoot upside downwards, so as to make the blossoms pendulous instead of upright, when, of course, all their beauty is destroyed. The pendulous blossom so inverted looks weak and

straggling, the erect one stiff and heavy. Many too, cram flowers together in round dense bunches so that we can see the shape of nothing. Sometimes this can hardly be avoided, as in the case of Cowslips or Violets. And assuredly few contrasts can be more lovely than Violets, white and purple, massed together with a bunch of Primroses, and all resting on the broad green Primrose leaves. But what we get here is chiefly the colour and the smell. Flowers generally are best arranged more loosely, and with more of the herbage attached, even if there must be fewer of them. Thus in spring I like to have two or three bright scarlet Anemones (*hortensis*), with two or three spikes of Grape Hyacinth (*racemosum*), two Jonquils, two pieces of white Ranunculus, two brown Fritillaries (*Pyrenaica*) and two white ones, and a single stem of the large pink Saxifrage, and all these intermixed and put together

loosely in a small vase, so as to look as if they were growing in a meadow, but growing unusually close. Summer flowers may be arranged more massively, but are often cut without sufficient length of stalk, so that the Larkspurs cannot rise well out of the Sweet Williams and shorter species. Always, then, look well to the forms, and let these be clearly seen and skilfully combined. Take care of them, and the colours will take care of themselves. For nine people have an eye for colour to one who thinks about form; and those who care nothing for colour will seldom be much interested in flowers.

But are these faults we have been speaking of universal? That I really cannot say; though well acquainted with flowers, I know comparatively little about gardening. I merely allude to faults which we are continually meeting with in greater or less degree, and which seem to be fast

spreading in our private gardens; and I have thought best to attack these evils in their boldest and most decisive forms. At any rate, I have shown my meaning; and where the charges do not apply, they will do no injury.

Note 1.

The best plants for gardens are European or quasi-European species, because these are the most congenial to our soil and climate, and the most perfectly intelligible to us in their habits and mode of growth. But how many people can have any clear idea as to what Geraniums or Calceolarias would look like, or try to do, where they grow wild and free? I myself continually feel, as in the case of the Chinese Primrose, that such ignorance is a great bar to my enjoyment of the flower, and the knowledge is scarcely to be

got from books. Yet it must always be distinctly borne in mind that Art is not Nature. Let people create beauty howsoever they please, and of whatsoever materials, we must not blame them unless we can show that their method is injurious. But I do blame the modern taste as tyrannous and exclusive, casting out just the plants which should be dearest to us, to make room for those which can never come so near to heart. Think of gardeners stigmatising, as I am told is the case, the Lilac and Laburnum as plebeian!—the Laburnum, the fair-haired lady of the garden. To what pitch of degradation must that man's taste have sunk who could reject and despise so elegant a tree as this!

NOTE 2.

But why should we not receive the garden as a pure creation of the gardener, feel that it is beautiful, and be satisfied with that, without looking

any further? The question is implicitly answered in the last chapter. Because in such a manner we shall never gain a strong interest in the individual flowers. Unfortunately, this easy course is the very one which most people prefer to take, and which the gardeners desire that they should take. But to feel deep delight in plants, and yet think little about them—to love, and not wish to know intimately the object loved—is a palpable impossibility. When people act in this way, their feelings cannot be worth much. Besides, to an unspoiled taste the beauty of our modern gardens is in many respects unpleasing, and we greatly miss the higher kind of beauty of which it is depriving us.

NOTE 3.

Of course my remarks in the preceding chapter are in nowise directed against the common hardy

annuals. These plants pass their whole term of life in the garden, start up from the ground in their proper season as naturally as do the weeds, and it is quite immaterial whether they are self-sown or sown by hand. It is widely different in the case of those half-hardy flowers—perennials, made annual most of them—which are set in the beds in the middle of their growth, and are weeks before they seem at home. I think such beds highly objectionable when constituting the sole or main feature of a garden, to which everything else must give way. The common annuals are, in fact, of great value, especially for children's gardens. Their growth can be watched from the earliest stages, and its great rapidity, the speedy performance of all promise, together with the consciousness of having tended the plant from the very first, exerts a peculiar fascination. But many annuals are getting spoilt through the senseless

desire of change for the sake of change;—old good sorts thrown away to make room for new and inferior ones, and sound pure colouring rejected for streaky, splashy variety.

Note 4.

If you have flowers growing in your rooms in the early months of the year, let them be as much as possible of exotic and unfamiliar species, rather than such as properly belong to the out-of-door garden. Take, for instance, Mimosas, Camellias, Hyacinths, in preference to Snowdrops, Aconites, or Crocuses. The reason for this is obvious. A house-raised Snowdrop will seldom be as beautiful as one grown in the open air, for the cold is not uncongenial to these plants, and the warmth of a room is far more likely to weaken them than to develop them to greater advantage. Besides, the flower-pot necessarily gives them a much more

artificial look, so that you are depriving yourself of half the pleasure you would gain from the out-of-door blossoms when they come, by dulling your appetite with these miserable makeshifts, instead of waiting with patience. The Christmas Rose is some exception to what I have said. Its blossoms, I believe, are generally much finer in the greenhouse.

NOTE 5.

We exclude from our gardens as weeds, and with perfect justice, such plants as our ordinary Cruciferæ and Umbelliferæ, or the common Dead Nettles and Clovers. This does not necessarily mean that they are deficient in beauty, but that they have not any of those effective qualities—that power of instantly attracting the eye when planted separately, which is necessary in a garden flower. Chærophyllum Temulum, for instance,

like many another of the Hemlocks, is a most graceful plant when met with in a country lane, but if placed on the border, a great part of its beauty would vanish. It needs the dense green vegetation of the hedge bottom to show it off to advantage. But Mullein, Borage, Foxgloves, and the larger Spurges ought not to be considered weeds. Such plants have their proper place in the garden, and may be very pleasing there, though it is just upon this class that the modern taste weighs heaviest. Where are all those quaint strange plants which used to make us wonder? Rhododendrons are very beautiful, but they cannot supply that loss. Strange! and yet it was a strangeness which sprang almost from beneath our feet, out of what seemed most familiar, and not like that of some far-fetched tropical growth. This strangeness excited strong interest, and as it were difficulty of belief, it seemed so very

near; the strangeness of tropical plants excites much less of this, for we can credit with more ease what belongs to countries so far away, and of which we know so little. And surely in that child-world, where everything is wonderful, it is better that we should have our deepest interest aroused by such plants as our own Wake-robin than by any of those distant curiosities. I use the old name Wake-robin because it is so full of poetry—to think of the bird aroused from sleep by the soundless ringing of that bell. Arum, or Lords and Ladies, is the more usual name. In none of those plants, then, which I mentioned above, do I see unfitness for the garden. They have not the dulness and heaviness of the Stachys and many other Dead Nettles (the dulness of the Henbane is widely other), nor the coarseness of Charlock or Turnip, nor straggling looseness, nor any other of similar objectionable

qualities: here and there, accordingly, such plants should be admitted.

Note 6.

I believe that nearly every plant has an especial loveliness of its own—a something distinctive, that is, which is capable of endearing it to us. And though such degraded forms as Torilis Nodosa may attract us chiefly as curiosities in all but exceptional instances, this loveliness founds itself upon some form of genuine beauty —beauty, I grant, which, as a whole, is often of an inferior order; thus there is nothing to strike the eye in the common wild Mignonette, or in many of the Galiums, Willow-herbs, Groundsels, Rushes, Sedges; and yet it frequently happens that these plants, not generally attractive, excel at particular times and in particular ways. Usually few people would admire the Yellow Charlock, yet

what splendour it often casts over the yet green corn-fields when blended with the scarlet of the Poppies! Anthriscus Vulgaris, Sylvestris, and many of the Umbelliferæ are remarkable for the beauty of their earliest leaves; those especially of the great Cow Parsnep might serve as models for the stone-carver; and the coarse insignificant Goosegrass (*Galium aparine*), which children rub over their tongues to make them bleed, fills every hedge-bottom in January and February with a host of tiny star-crosses as delicate as the work of fairies. Then observe that tall Anthriscus Sylvestris later on in June, how it varies the long level of many an unmown meadow with the dull misty white of its flowers, giving by the looseness of its growth a wild, indefinite look, here and there almost reminding us of tumbled foam, an effect which is greatly aided by the meanness and unimpressiveness of its foliage. Then the two common

Dead Nettles (*Lamium*) are very undeservedly depreciated. The Red Dead Nettle is one of our earliest spring flowers, and there is a soft vividness in the red, especially in the earlier blossoms, which leads off most exquisitely through the purplish tints of the upper leaves. As to the White Dead Nettle, I will say nothing of it in the spring-time, when it is outshone by more brilliant rivals. I always prefer it when the November mists are falling, and its large soft flowers, undamaged by the weather, look forth here and there from the hedge. Truly they have a wonderful fascination then. In early spring the plant has a too excessive vigour—an air of rude health, which often spoils it, partly, I think, by affecting the leaf colour; besides, the stems are apt, then, to be far too numerous. It is otherwise in November.

Plants are thus far more universally beautiful than animals, because plants can never disgust or

repel—animals can. And though it were easy to name plants in which one feels no vivid interest, as, for instance, Senecio Sylvatica, I find, on running through our native lists, these to be comparatively so few, that the fault lies most probably with the observer.

Note 7.

What horror is excited by some insects—spiders and centipedes—especially in their gigantic tropical forms! Not to feel this, argues insensibility to a part of Nature's language, and deprives us of pleasure, for it is with a horror bordering on the sublime that we read of the huge Mygales—spiders almost a foot across. Naturalists get too much deadened to these feelings, just as a medical student finds his dread of the corpse to become so far diminished as seriously to impair his relish for any tales of fear. He gets to look upon it too

much as a mass of ordinary matter. By-the-bye, what is the use of such pests of hot countries as mosquitoes and the other creatures I have named? Apparently this: man is meant for a life of labour, to which the temperate climes are best adapted. But in the tropics labour is far more productive than in the temperate zone, and if there were nothing to prevent it, most men might go there for an easy life. So God holds man back by a host of plagues, of which these creatures form a part. You may live in the tropics if you will, but your comforts must be heavily counterbalanced.

Note 8.

No one would ever dream of employing our commoner British flowers for the main stock of a garden. We must have there something essentially different from what is found in the Wild.

We like our home to be fenced in by a little world of novelty as well as of brilliance and choiceness, and hence a twofold reason points us to the more conspicuous beauty of the foreign flowers. But this is not our only ground for selecting foreign plants. Cultivation is, in many cases, extremely beneficial to plants, but in other instances it is difficult to compete with the wilding, and almost impossible to surpass it. In Gorse—such, for instance, as we see in Devonshire—Foxglove (unless, to borrow an idea from Ruskin, a greater number of its blossoms could be persuaded to come out simultaneously), or Broom, no improvement of any kind could well be suggested. These plants would be none the better for enlargement of the flowers, and both shapes and colours are already as fine as they can be, so that meddling further would only spoil them, as we see to be the case in the Double Gorse. Now unless the cul-

tivated flower in some way surpasses the wilding, it must inevitably sink below it in effect. For one thing is entirely lost in the garden—the beauty derived from the native mode of growth. Look at the Bluebell Hyacinths, when their countless myriads are poured forth beneath the trees like a scented twilight, the blue, wherever it grows thin, dimming into such coy, uncertain cast, that it seems like a misty exhalation, or as if May had sportively dashed the earth with her coolest and most fragrant wine. Gather a handful from that drooping host, or, still better, sit down and study the flower as it grows, and you would say scarcely anything could be more lovely. But what do we think of it in a garden? There is perhaps no real inferiority, if the plants be well grown and limited to the shade; but the spirit and vitality seem in a measure wanting, and our interest consequently is feeble. The Bluebell

often spoils in the garden from an unnatural bloating of its flowers; but, apart from this, there is such an utter separation from the circumstances which gave full effect to its beauty, that it is as the gem without the setting, the setting sun stripped of the gorgeous robing of his clouds. Now in cases like this, the sight of the cultivated plant may do you positive harm. As in the house-grown Snowdrop, you become familiarised with what is virtually an inferior condition, and this only deadens your love. The plant will probably get surrounded with unpleasant associations, but at any rate you learn to see it without interest, and that is very mischievous. The consequence is that, generally speaking, we should either exclude these common native plants from the garden, or so alter them by cultivation that they shall seem like a different thing. The Double Buttercup (Bachelor's Buttons) is a com-

mon country example of the way in which they may be so altered, and the Garden Daisies and Polyanthuses are still better examples, being more completely metamorphosed.

Now this argument will generally tell most with respect to those native flowers which are less conspicuous, less remarkable for brilliancy and other garden-needed qualities. Thus the Bluebell and Forget-me-not lose infinitely more in the garden than the Globe Flower and the Columbine. Yet this is not all, as the Foxglove shows us; there are the local associations, though these are actually very much more valuable in some plants than in others. When we see it in the garden we can scarcely appreciate the Foxglove—that glorious link betwixt the heath, the wood, and the open meadow—for want of the light grassed soil, the bracken and the gorse, and all its other friends. And the Bluebell fails in

our gardens, not solely because it is thrown back on its own unassisted merits, but partly because it is dragged from its destined sphere of display. Plant it by the side of Scilla Campanulata—the common garden bell which so much resembles it, though it has dark red stamens, and larger, wider-open flowers—and I think that most people will prefer the Scilla; partly, no doubt, because the Bluebell is an English flower, but partly, too, because the Scilla, though in itself less beautiful, has a beauty more adapted to the garden, and which loses far less than the Bluebells by being isolated. I feel confident that our verdict would be reversed, if we could compare the plants as they grow wild.

The Bluebell and Foxglove are in themselves not unfit for gardens, or as illustrations of my argument they would be worthless. They become objectionable there, mainly because they are

common native plants, with strong local associations, and grow, at full advantage, wild.

My conclusion, then, is, let the Garden be to the Wild *idem in altero*; that is to say, let it be mainly stocked with plants of close affinity to our own, so as to be adapted to our climate and to be pretty thoroughly intelligible to us, but yet let them, as far as possible, be of different, dissimilar, and more splendid species. Such species are more attractive in themselves, and lose least by being stripped of their natural surroundings. It may be necessary to remind the reader that Globe Flowers, Jacob's Ladder, Columbine, and many other of our most valuable garden plants are native species; but they are very locally distributed in Britain. If commoner, though we should still employ them, their value would be injuriously diminished. Still not unfrequently a common plant, like the Primrose, will be found to do good service.

Note 9.

Solon declared that to be the best of governments in which an injury down to the meanest subjects is an insult to the whole community. Now this is pretty much the law of a garden. Nothing is more objectionable than the manner in which the common plants are often treated to make way for the grandees. Bulbs taken up before they are ready, and dwarfed for next season in consequence; small trees or shrubs transplanted carelessly, and thrust in wherever they will do no harm, because a little too good to throw away, and not quite good enough to deserve just treatment; and many other plants neglected, overshadowed, or in some way stinted of their due, as not being worth much trouble. At times, even worse than this, we see murderous digging and slashing amongst plants in their period of growth. This is not a healthy process for the mind. What-

ever is unfairly treated is better altogether away, since we can view it with no hearty relish. And this injustice to the least is felt inevitably in a measure by all, for it affects the spirit of the place. Half the charm of the old-fashioned garden lies in that look of happy rest among the plants, each of which seems to say, "All plant life is sacred when admitted here. My own repose has never been disturbed, and I am confident it never will be." You feel this to be a sort of heaven of plant life, preserved by some hidden charm from the intrusion of noxious weeds. The modern garden, on the contrary, is too apt to assume a look of stir and change; here to-day, gone to-morrow. The very tidiness of the beds and the neat propriety of the plants contribute to this impression. We feel the omnipresence of a severity which cannot tolerate straggling. None have been admitted but polished gentlemen who will never break the

rules; and we feel that the most cherished offender would be instantly and remorselessly punished.* But the old garden impresses us always by that evidence of loving tenderness for the plants. "That wallflower ought not to have come up in the box-edging; but never mind, we must manage to get on without hurting the wallflower." And it is this spirit of compromise, this happy, genial, kindly character, as contrasted with the sterner and less loving spirit which you feel ready to descend upon any transgressor in a moment, that makes the difference of which we speak.

It is plain, then, that in any garden where the

* I have been referring here to the herbaceous plants and evergreens of the ordinary beds (Thujas, Junipers, Rhododendrons, &c.), rather than to the larger trees and shrubs. To run down the glorious Rhododendrons in themselves would be preposterous, but they always have, however large they may grow, an air of gentlemanly restraint, a drawing-room manner, as it were, which must produce the effect we have described wherever they are very numerous.

meaner plants are slighted or endangered, this sense of security is impossible. Each should be safe and honourable by right of citizenship, by the mere fact of its presence being allowed. We should feel that the test of merit has been applied already, and is not liable to renewal. But if we cannot regard this decision as final, if the meaner plants are always liable to be retried, and possibly condemned, or neglected as of doubtful worth, everything alike will share their risk. The most beautiful is then cast upon its own merits exclusively, and the thought of final rest is gone.

"But you must be recommending a general scene of misrule, if the plants are to do as they please." No, for I am only dealing with appearances. If the wallflower which has strayed into the box should look unsightly, by all means root it out. I only want the aspect of liberty in the plants, so that the garden shall, as most wild

vegetation is, be expressive of fatherly, indulgent, peaceful rule; for the vegetable kingdom is the sphere of all others from which disquiet and restraint are by nature the most completely banished. Life is too cold in the mineral kingdom; in the animal we rise into the region of will and contest with moral evil. Amongst plants there is comparatively little to disturb; the beauty, if of a lower type, is more generally perfect than anywhere else, and nowhere can we find better images of the rest of heaven than in a broad expanse of flowers. I spoke of box-edgings. We used to see these in the little country gardens, with paths of crude earth or gravel. Nowadays it has been discovered that box harbours slugs, and we are beginning to have beds with tiled borders, whilst the walks are made of asphalt! For a pleasure-ground in Dante's Inferno such materials might be suitable.

II.

ON GARDENERS' FLOWERS.

I THINK that the question left from last chapter will be most advantageously treated in a somewhat more extended form. So we will now inquire into the mischief which is done to taste by a too exclusive attention to highly cultivated plants. A flower in its natural state, as for instance the Primrose or Buttercup, will generally consist of the following elements: an outer ring, green and leaf-like, which is called the calyx, and an inner ring, usually coloured, the corolla. These are but the floral envelopes, and either of them may be modified in all manner of ways,—being coloured, colourless (which in

botanical language means green), or altogether wanting. Within them lies the true flower, composed of the thread-like, pin-headed stamens, and the central organs, or pistils, which afterwards ripen into fruit. Now each of these parts, stamen, pistil, or petal, essentially is nothing but an altered form of leaf, a leaf as it were half nourished. And under favourable circumstances, with an increased supply of food, their forms can readily be changed. The stamens and pistils become petals, the petals themselves increase in size and number, and we have what is called a double flower. And the cultivator usually considers a flower most perfect when he has succeeded in making it double, of extraordinary size, and of what he regards as the most perfect shape and colour. At least, he then has done his utmost, and the worth of the product is determined too much by the labour and skill which it has

cost. But gains of this sort cannot possibly be unattended with loss. Let us take, for instance, the double garden Roses, and although they are mostly derived from handsomer foreign species, it will be enough for our purpose to compare them with the common Dog Rose of the hedge. Here, then, in the garden flower the shape is truly magnificent. There are the countless large, soft, fragrant petals, nestling round so closely into the fulness of that deep warm bosom, and with a colour often scarce less exquisite, which sinks into the deep central dimple with a glowing blush, like a sunset into the clouds. Then turn to the Moss Rose, and see how deliciously the opening tints of the bud, like the face of an awakening beauty, look forth from their nest of thick green viscous moss. It would be difficult to adduce better instances of what cultivation can achieve. But let us contrast these with the Dog

Rose. In the first place, we find that in the garden plants the long arched shoots have disappeared, which stretch high over the hedge, or, descending, trail down their fragrant burden into the shady lanes below, within easy reach of every passer-by. Beautiful are they, close at hand! Beautiful in the distance when the hedges are everywhere breaking forth into the creamy foam of elder blossom, picked out with these showery touches of pink! Now such a free display of the general form of the Rose is evidently impossible in a garden. The plant must be cut down to the shape of the compacter standard, or else be disposed upon trelliswork. In either case its freedom is restrained, and even the freedom of trelliswork is incompatible with the full perfection of the blossom. Next we will look at the blossom, for that is the point which I would principally consider. In the wild plant you may at

first greatly miss the full substantial form of the double Rose, and the range of pink colours may also be less. Possibly, therefore, your first impression will be that the flower seems thin, loose, and weak. But you will begin to see presently that this is only the effect of the contrast. You cannot point out any real defect—one thing that could be altered to advantage. Every part, as you examine it, seems precise in aim, and well calculated to set off the rest, and in essential respects there is a far wider range of contrast in the flower itself. The soft petal bosom, it is true, is gone, but look at the delicate garland of countless stamens which replaces it. In the one case there is nothing but calyx and petals, the same thing being again and again repeated. In the other a new set of elements is introduced, and elements of extreme significance, for they vary exceedingly in all different species of plants, and generally the

greatest pains are bestowed to give them prominence and beauty. And observe what deep meaning they throw into the aspect of the Rose, giving it that expression of peaceful dreamy rest, something of which, though varied in a hundred ways, is common in blossoms where the stamens are numerous, as, for instance, we may often discern it in the Rock Rose and Ranunculaceous orders. Now I have here made a contrast the most unfavourable that could be thought of for my purpose. I have taken one of the gardener's noblest flowers, which has a dignity of form united with a significance of expression, such as cannot be met with in any other double flower, and yet I think it must be felt that in the garden plant a very great deal has been lost, and furthermore that this loss is of immense importance.

* The finest Dog Roses—I mean those which are the deepest pink—in many respects far surpass in colour the double Garden

"But study the single Rose as I may," you perhaps tell me, "I cannot like it much after the double one. I think it wants body, it seems loose

Roses. In the first place, their blush is almost unrivalled in the maiden softness of its glow. Then observe through what a wide range of harmonies we are led—outermost you see this sweet glowing pink, then a circle which is almost white, then the rich orange of the stamens, and finally a green disc in the centre, all these hues melting into and supporting each other with a softness and beauty indescribable. Can we meet with anything like this in the Garden Roses? But the force of the effect does not depend upon colour alone. If you look at the Dog Rose with half-closed eyes, and fancy for a moment that those alternating bands of pink, white, and orange are but changes in the tints of the corolla, you will find that their value is half lost. The effect of the stamens and pistils, and the highest value of their colour, depends upon their being *quite unlike the petals in make, being quite new and dissimilar structures.* It should also be remembered that double Roses are somewhat difficult to find perfect. A well-formed Cabbage Rose, and especially, perhaps, a Moss Rose, will serve to illustrate what I have said in the text. Here the petals fold closely over one another, so that we get a solid rotundity of form, which is too often frittered away in those blossoms where the petals are erecter and their concentric rings more open. The best of this latter class are very good indeed, but the worse ones exceedingly poor.

and weak, and I really care little for it. My feeling is altogether so different when I come to the double Rose from the single. These little points you mention, the stamens and the pistils, never enter my head for a moment; I do not feel the want of them, they are wholly forgotten in that luxuriant fulness of beauty. Does not this prove the absolute superiority of the double flower, seeing that I feel no loss in it, and that it gives me all which is essential for my pleasure?" By no means. The one thing really proved is this, that your taste is most seriously injured. You cannot believe that the work of God is faulty here, and that the Wild Rose is an imperfect creation.* You

* Whether God ever purposely makes flowers defective is quite another question. But such instances are certainly exceptional. And the ground on which the single Rose is here condemned would condemn the large majority of our most beautiful single flowers upon the general principle of their construction.

never would have thought it so if you had seen it before you saw the double flower. With you it is only faulty by comparison. So that here is a pure, noble, and, as all men of right feeling will tell you, a perfect work of its kind, in which you can take no pleasure, because to you it seems weak and faulty. Now, to speak my own feelings, though in turning to the Garden Rose I cannot feel it faulty any more than you do, I soon find that I miss something there; that is, I should soon be wearied if I had none but such Roses as these, and was absolutely debarred from the complete wild ones. And do you not see the reason of this, viz., that the beauties of the cultivated Rose are more especially of that sensuous striking kind which can hardly be overlooked, and are apt to veil in their blaze the simpler and less obtrusive, though more deeply satisfying, charms of the Wild Rose? "But some of our double

Roses have their stamens and pistils left to them." They have, and in trimming betwixt single and double they have lost the excellencies of both. Double flowers are often good and highly valuable, but in nearly every instance that I can call to mind the half-way betwixt single and double is a thorough failure. The multiplied petals have destroyed the simplicity of the single, whilst they cannot give the full form of the double blossom, and the stamens are often more or less disarranged and broken, and in any case such petals must make them worthless. From this general condemnation I should except the half-double Columbine, where the many rows of petals fit together into a very elegant bonnet shape. The peculiar structure in a flower like this prevents much of the usual mischief.* What,

* An approach to half-double flowers may sometimes be found in Nature in such types as the Cactus, where the petals

then, is the general conclusion to which I would lead? I would say that the doubling of a blossom, whatever advantages may accrue from it, tends on the whole to destroy individuality, to sweep away the differences between flowers, and to bring them all down to uniformity; and, worst of all, it detracts from the life of the expression. The stamens and pistils, which are half the character of the flower, which are as the very eyes in the human countenance, are removed to make room for more showy colour, and for a fuller and more massive, but as a whole inferior, form. For we should pause before saying that any of these gains is a gain in the highest sense.*

How rich is the crimson of the double Peony —how delicious to wander from fold to fold of

are very numerous, and in several rows; but the arrangement is much less beautiful than the more common kind.

* See Note 7 at the end of the chapter.

those innumerable petals, almost as if amongst the clouds, and see how the ever-changeful tints deepen and graduate between them! Do I blame the gardener for creating this? Not at all, but I would have you observe what has been lost. The single Peony had not that lavish wealth of crimson, that wide play of a single hue, but in true splendour it surpassed. For the quantity of its crimson was determined by a given purpose, was carefully arranged and accurately proportioned so as to contrast with the central crown. The one blossom gives a rich sensuous pleasure which steeps the soul as in a bath; the other a pleasure of a much higher kind, and embracing far wider compass. Colour, it has been said, is life —that which gives vitality to form. It exists not only for itself, but to carry out an object. And the colour of the single Peony most beautifully does this. The actual range, too, of colour, as gene-

rally happens, is much wider than in the double flower, for the orange and green of the stamens and pistils are superadded to the crimson—not perhaps those oranges and greens best calculated to show off separately, but those best adapted to the particular effect here required, to light up the parts by striking contrast, and to give the look of a living thing. In the double Peony, on the contrary, the less brilliant colours are refused. There must be nothing inferior to crimson. And we can have any quantity—the more the better; for there is here no nice balance to be preserved, no form to be set off, but that of a large round ball, massive and handsome enough, but by no means highly individualised. And what is the consequence? The fully-opened flower of the single Peony is like the countenance of a living creature; that of the double has a form so vague and featureless that we might easily forget

that it was a flower at all, and think that we were looking at a magnificent bunch of delicately-coloured ribbons. Yet when I speak of colour being subordinated to a purpose in the single flower, I do not mean that it is in anywise of less importance. Colour is nowhere more brilliant and precious than in flowers, but the best effects must be got by judicious use, and not by lavish exuberance.*

In every instance where we have seen a flower only in its double state, we feel to know little

* I would not deny that the double flower may at times gain greatly in colour taken as a whole. Look, for instance, at the double pink Hepatica, which appears in February and March, gleaming like a little amethyst amongst the Crocuses, the bright clear hue being doubly delightful from its rarity at that early season. Yet, after all, the pink and white Hepaticas are but inferior varieties of the blue, and no double modification of any of them is able to equal that. It will be seen, too, that in even the single pink Hepatica the ordinary rule applies—it has more life expression than the double.

about it, for it appears but half a flower. There is a plant common in gardens which I have been told is a species of Corchorus. I like what I know of it, and would gladly make its nearer acquaintance, but the double blossoms hold me quite aloof, and it seems little better than a stranger. Notwithstanding, in the double Rose and Peony, whatever may be the loss, the gain is in some respects great. There are other flowers, however, in which the case is widely different. Look, for instance, at the blossom of a well-grown single Hollyhock, with its central column of white mealy stamens, around which the bees are for ever digging and burrowing, and observe how beautifully this column completes the deep bowl-like corolla, and then stand apart and see how by these columns the whole spire is illuminated, every part of it brought out into clear relief, as by a lamp placed in the centre of each flower. No mere alteration

of colour could ever produce this effect. It is only to be got by an essential change of structure in the parts of the flower. Now would you think it possible that any one would be willing to throw away these beautiful stamens, and have the corolla choked up by a blind unmeaning mass of spongy petal?* Yet such is actually the case. And once, when I went into the market to ask for single Hollyhocks, the gardener, civil as he was, seemed absolutely taken by surprise. "Single Hollyhocks! No, sir, I wouldn't keep such things!"

The common Garden Anemone is another case in point: never was the effect of central organs better seen than in the single flower, where the stamens cluster so exquisitely around and into that black bee-like crown. Now the Anemone has

* Unmeaning, that is, in comparison with what it replaces. The blossoms of the double Hollyhock have a full noble form, but one can never heartily enjoy them from a sense of what is missing.

some peculiar charm which excites in me an almost indescribable rapture, and that crown is as it were the very culmination of the whole. And I cannot but think that here, if not in the Hollyhock, the double flower which the gardeners so much prefer will be absolutely painful, from its inferiority, to any man of right feeling, who has the means of obtaining the single one. Now the effect of such false principles fully carried out may be seen in the taste of the common people. They will generally, under any circumstances, prefer the highly-cultivated flower to the simple one, just for that one quality of bigness and plumpness. In the same way, most vulgar people admire great red-faced women, and judge of the beauty of prize pigs and oxen by their size.

There is the double Snowdrop—on the whole, I should think, the most ungainly flower we have.

All the characteristic beauty of the Snowdrop, the delicate curvatures of the petals, the contrast betwixt the light, thin, flexible outer petals, and the inner, short, stout, unyielding cup, have wholly disappeared, in order that that light graceful form may be stuffed out as you would stuff a pillow-case, with a bunch of strips arranged like a pen-wiper. The gain here is positively nothing, for fulness in the Snowdrop is a real deformity. Yet the common people often say they would not give a straw for Snowdrops if they are not double ones. There are many other double flowers which are utterly bad, without any redeeming quality, such as double Violets, Narcissuses, Tulips, and Nasturtiums.

Lastly, in double flowers how the shape of the petals is destroyed! There is naturally a wide difference in form between the petals of a Saxifrage and those of a Cruciferous plant. Look,

for instance, at a single Stock or Wallflower. The broad coloured blade of the petal runs inwards horizontally to the very centre of the blossom, so as to press in close upon the stamens, and then turns downwards with a sudden bend into a long invisible claw. Now take a Saxifrage; most of the common tufted kinds would do, or the large pink Crassifolia of the gardens, or Saxifraga Granulata. Here the petal form is entirely different, sloping down gradually like a funnel, and leaving the centre of the flower widely open. Now, in the double flower all this character is lost from the centre of the blossom being choked up, and the clawed and unclawed petals look pretty much alike.

We have taken double flowers as the furthest point to which the art of gardening carries us, but in highly-cultivated single flowers we find the same tendencies, although in a less degree. There is

the same general disposition to bring everything to the largest possible size and a full rounded shape. And the course here followed is in the main undoubtedly the right one. But whilst it creates much beauty, it is still attended with losses, though of far less importance than those I have just described. Thus our Wild Pansies have an extremely irregular corolla. The four upper petals point upwards, though perhaps not always quite so markedly as is described in botanical books, and tend to a more or less oblong form. Now these characteristic peculiarities in the petals, with the very characteristic and beautiful effect which arises from them, are completely rounded away in the Garden Pansy; its shape is nearly circular. The gain is here of the highest value, for the outline, colour, and expression in a good Garden Pansy are all alike most beautiful, so that the flower is sound as a work of art; but still

its advantages are necessarily attended with the almost complete destruction of the original character of the plant. Something of the same sort will be seen in the greenhouse Geraniums, or more strictly speaking Pelargoniums. The marked irregularities of the corolla, which every one must have noticed in the smaller species, and which are common to all alike, in greater or less degree, often get well-nigh obliterated in the artificial fulness of the larger and handsomer plants. The improvements are still more valuable and beautiful than in the Pansy, but, as in the Pansy, much of the natural shape is inevitably lost in producing them. We may trace this even in the Tom Thumb Geranium and its larger garden varieties. And so in other instances. The irregularities, the narrowness, the unsymmetrical arrangements of Nature, disappear to some extent in the highly-cultivated plant, and a

different character is introduced. Although large size is a very important object, it must not be too heedlessly sought after. I have known writers speak as if beauty could be estimated by tape measure—the improvements made in the Anemone being tested by the fact that the diameter of the blossom had been increased from one inch to six. But what are we the better for Anemones six inches across? The mere fact of their being so large would be sufficient proof that they had been spoilt.

The dangers resulting from too great love of double flowers are sufficiently obvious from what I have said already. Yet it must not be thought that I am trying to depreciate the just merits of the class. Though as a whole inferior to the single blossoms, their superiority in individual points is often undeniable. The best double forms, like those of the Peony and the Rose, have

a fulness and majesty which cannot but be deeply felt, resulting from that broad and massive rotundity than which no other single quality can be more immediately impressive. And, in addition to this, we have the gorgeous colour, spread over a wider surface than in the single, and often with infinitely greater command over some particular hue. But, spite of all this, though the double flower both may and ought to yield us much enjoyment, I think just feeling will prefer, for the reasons already given, to anchor permanently on the single. The double may be handsomer, and in some respects more dignified, but we feel it to be less of a companion.

And excessive attention to highly-cultivated single flowers is not without its hazards. Do we not often, whilst admiring those large broadly-developed forms with their splendid colours, feel

a want of something more quiet and reserved? To take, for instance, that magnificent blue Larkspur, which the gardeners call Formosum, and which has become one of the commonest kinds from its extraordinary beauty, we cannot help feeling a sort of excess, a want of sufficient sobriety in the flower, which somewhat mars our pleasure. To give a parallel from poetry. Few critics would find fault with Keats' "St. Agnes' Eve." We are glad to obtain such a glorious vision at any cost. And yet here and there we find its beauty almost oppressive, in that continual effort after the utmost possible luxury of sensuous appeal. How the richness of the spiced dainties, of the dishes, the cloth, in fact, of everything in the room, is pressed forward! We feel constantly as if it would have been impossible for the poet to carry this a single hair's-breadth further. It is not so in Tennyson's "Recollections of the

Arabian Nights," and the richer style can hardly be considered perfectly healthy.

Now I know a Larkspur far inferior in beauty to Formosum, to which it is a relief to turn, because the colour is so chastely used, and every portion of it is made of such good account. Look, too, at the Gentianella, the most glorious blue we have. One touch of the tint, and only one, but how it makes us long for more! If we could fill the tube with the enchanting colour, and spread it over the dark outside, should we really find that we had gained anything? It is just in this severity, this giving full value to all the colour used, that highly-cultivated flowers are oftenest defective. Perhaps we should rather say, that their most distinctive excellence lies in another direction.

The more natural flowers exhibit generally a self-imposed restraint, and reservation of power:

they seem making no effort to be beautiful. The highly-cultivated flower will often impress us too much with this idea that it is doing its utmost, and that it could not well be larger, nor fuller, nor its colours in the least more showy.* Consequently, in the largest Auriculas, Wallflowers, Azaleas, Petunias, we feel a certain laxity, as if the form were almost breaking from its bounds. By keeping too much, then, to these garden flowers, you will be tempted to lose sight of the value of narrowness in shape, and of modest severity in colouring, and be continually wishing, as the gardener generally does, to see everything carried on from fuller to fuller, and so to the perfect consummation of fulness in the double blossom.

* Just as in looking at the Farnese Hercules you say, "What a noble figure! Could any one imagine a frame more muscular than this?" But no such thought ever enters your head whilst you contemplate the superb proportions of the Theseus (Hercules?) of the Elgin marbles.

We may say that the gardener's taste bears a certain analogy to that of Rubens. Rubens was a master of amazing power, and it lay easily within his compass to give form of a very high order, along with much dignity and pathos, if not absolute beauty, of feature. But in general the effect of his forms depends rather upon sensuous fulness than upon fineness of proportion and delicately-moulded outline. This is most obviously seen in his women. You cannot deny that they often have magnificent figures, as, for instance, the goddesses in the "Judgment of Paris," in the National Gallery, and still more in other cases where there is loose and flowing drapery, but the beauty is comparatively of a low and sensuous type. There is something very different in the figures of the best antiques, or in the heads of Leonardo da Vinci. And we may go yet higher, so as to speak of expression, and

compare these women of Rubens' with Raphael's St. Catherine, or with that Madonna by Perugino in the National Gallery, around whom the still landscape, with its sacred light, seems to gather like a glory. In these pictures there is nothing superficially attractive, except the colouring of the latter; the figures are somewhat heavy, the hands large and careless, but does not the soul within them shine brighter and brighter as we gaze, and will not every painter allow the superiority of such beauty? Even so it is with many a simple field-flower. We scarcely know what its beauty comes from, what renders it so dear, so full of deeper meaning, and yet sooner than lose it we would part with some of the choicest flowers of the garden, and many a wild one which far surpasses it in every outward advantage.

We may note another point of comparison. One

of Rubens' highest excellences is colour, a very showy colour,—in fact, always toned up to a certain standard of floridity. But is Rubens, with all his gorgeousness and prodigality, ever ranked with the very greatest colourists? Now, our gardeners very closely resemble him here.

In conclusion, then, I think that the gardener does wrong in too frequently driving out the single flower by the double, especially when, as in double Anemones and Hollyhocks, the gain is very paltry in comparison with the loss. He is wrong, moreover, when he creates what can only be felt as deeply degraded flowers, like the double Tulips, Narcissuses, and Violets, these last being only valued for their superior fragrance; or when he aims at great size without due regard to its effect upon the highest beauty of the plant; or when he seeks after tawdry variations of colour. He acts as a true artist, on the other hand, in

creating those full, rounded, Rubens-like forms, whenever they are really noble; or in obtaining any worthy gain, whether by increasing the size of the blossoms or intensifying their natural brilliancy of colour, even if at some cost to the perfect harmonies of the plant; or in creating such strange loveliness as that of those double Carnations, where the edge of each creamy petal is drawn with a narrow line of pink, all the rest of the blossom being left as spotless as the snow; or lastly, in improving, and here with scarcely any drawback, the various kinds of fruit. In these and a hundred other such cases the gardener well deserves the gratitude of every lover of flowers.

But then comes our caution. Whilst looking at these splendid flowers, let us never be so far dazzled as to forget that they are for the most part highly artificial products. Much of their beauty is produced at the expense of native

character; and the cultivator, perhaps necessarily overvaluing the changes effected by his art, learns to fix attention too much upon beauties of one special type. Hence, without due balance, we may easily get to underrate all flower beauty to which this artificial standard is inapplicable, and perhaps come to dislike every form of that wild looser sort of vegetation which is wholly excluded from the garden. Moreover, it is not well to be too constantly dwelling on splendour. We need something more sober for our habitual food. For all these reasons, if we would avoid injury to the taste, we must make wild flowers our habitual study. True appreciation of flowers, as I have said before, can only be learnt in the fields. Accustom yourself to contemplate those quiet and unselected charms, look again and again even at the most insignificant till you are able to recognise their loveliness, and then you will know what true

excellence means, and be in no danger of being led away by meretricious qualities. The pure works of God will give you the best criterion for judging the works of man. In all this, botany will assist you much, by making you universal, drawing your attention to small and great alike, and compelling you to take note of a thousand peculiarities which you would otherwise overlook. But, above all things, scorn nothing. Never fear to admire old-fashioned flowers because they are spoken of with contempt. Never fear to look for yourself; to form, and slowly if necessary, your own opinion. Scorn, in fact, *of anything save moral evil,* is perhaps the basest passion known to man. Nothing is further removed from the character of a true-hearted Christian gentleman (and two sorts of gentlemen can hardly be said to exist), or, to use a vulgar phrase, there is nothing in the world so snobbish.

There are many wide differences betwixt the prince and the peasant, but in whatever rank you meet a snob, habitual scorn of others, or of any of the works of God, is the infallible mark by which you know him.

Perhaps you will say that my disparagement of double flowers is the result of my being a botanist. Well, and what if this be true? The botanist chooses his pursuit from strong instinctive love for flowers, and so is surely more likely to judge rightly than another man. I admit that there may be some botanists who are nothing more than hard-headed collectors of names, to whom plants are but hooks on which labels may be hung. But botanists of another class have in this respect been much misrepresented, because they do not, or perhaps cannot, speak out their thoughts. That man who appears only to be seeking after rare or novel species, who

may never seem to notice or be interested in mere scientific arrangements, is perhaps tremblingly alive to the beauty of what he finds; and the beauty is of more importance than the science, as the heart is nobler than the head. You may not be able to see what good such an one may get by running on from form to form, as eagerly as if seeking after gold, and perhaps he himself could not tell you; but if God thought it worth His while to plan these forms, it is surely not beneath the dignity of man to study them. In short, then, a botanist's love for simple natural flowers is generally the evidence of an uncorrupted taste. He has had absolutely nothing to mislead him, for his original motive in the study can seldom be other than the pure inspiration of love, and the study itself is large and wide, embracing without any exclusiveness great and small, fantastic and beautiful alike, yet all

of the truest workmanship. He takes them just as he finds them, blended together just as God saw fit that they should grow. The feelings of a man like this may possibly be cold, but it is hardly likely that they should be radically false. But does not the botanist prefer the single flower because in the double the natural connections are undistinguishable? No doubt that he does. For this is no barren mechanical question. It means not only that we cannot number the stamens and pistils in a double flower, but that nearly all which distinguished it from other flowers is gone. So legibly is relationship written upon the features that the practised botanist can generally guess a strange plant's family (natural order) at a glance, petal, stamen, and every other part being in some degree characteristic; but in double flowers he knows little except from the calyx or the herbage, or some-

thing that is left unaltered. Now of course the beauty is degraded in proportion to this loss of character.

Note 1.

A highly-cultivated Pansy or Geranium of necessity loses much of its original character in the rounding out of the petals. Now as native character is almost always beautiful and impressive, its loss must be reckoned serious. But, on the other hand, we must take into account what the plant has gained both in character and beauty. See how many new elements have arisen in the highly-cultivated shape, which were almost or altogether undiscernible in the wild flower. See how many old elements have acquired new emphasis and power, which perhaps had but little meaning till they were embodied in a fuller form. And where cultivation even seems to

have diluted the wild shape, a certain boldness and dignity come in to atone for it. And thus the balance of losses and gains is, in many plants, extremely difficult to settle. You feel that each has its intrinsic excellences. The round outline of the cultivated Pansy is unmeaning as compared with that of the wild flower, whilst the wild flower looks poor beside the garden one. Yet in laying great stress upon the importance of character, it must not be thought that any character is valuable which depends upon mere weakness or deficiency. Difference of character must point to a different style of beauty, or it becomes most wholly worthless, and real gain in beauty must atone for any such loss. But why is the gardener in such risk of learning to dislike the special characters of the uncultivated flower? Simply because his labour is for the most part directed to efface them, to supplant that style of

beauty by the opposite. Yet it is not always so, as we see from the hothouse Orchids.

NOTE 2.

The gardener, then, is an artist who interprets Nature by showing her full capabilities, by carrying out any beautiful tendency whatsoever of a plant to its fullest consummation. It is a work not only of evolution, but of change. He sometimes appears principally to be enlarging the native form, and displaying it to better advantage; but he frequently must alter it altogether, as in the double flowers, and replace it by something new. His creations are, therefore, often necessarily very one-sided, and apt to be much influenced by caprices of novelty and fancy, so that it is well to counterbalance their effect upon the mind by an habitual study of wild plants. But it is only when he tempts us, any more than

he necessarily must, to narrow down our tastes, or wilfully leads us to prefer the lower to the higher, or carries out evil tendencies as to faulty colouring or shape, that we must hold him justly to blame.

But with reference to losses from cultivation, is the gardener always necessarily one-sided? May he not raise a plant, without material loss of any kind, to a higher order of beauty? Theoretically it appears by no means easy to say. Even if it were a mere question of size, can a plant be quite perfect that is designed for being two feet high, if it can be raised without any loss to three or four? How should we like our Snowdrops and Harebells to be of twice the present size? On the contrary, if the plant is improved by enlargement of the blossom, with or without corresponding diminution of the foliage, would not this show that the blossom had originally been too small? It might be answered,

of course, that some forms have dwindled or deteriorated, and may be restored by giving them the advantages they require. But this will not be the usual case. In general, where the wild plant seems really inferior, we shall probably find that the inferior form is best suited to its native home, and is the more beautiful of the two in the place where it was intended to grow. Nevertheless we may justly say that cultivation has raised it when the question of this local relationship is set aside. In itself we do not prefer the little stunted yew-tree, and yet it looks better high up upon the mountain crags than would the finest growth of the valley. I think that the Meadow Cowslips, with all their irregularities (I do not mean the irregularities seen in actually bad specimens, with perhaps three flowers to a head), would be ill replaced by better-grown ones; and this could hardly be understood from seeing the

plants in a garden where the original significance of their peculiarities is no longer to be seen. The loose, straggling appearance of many a weed is very valuable in the hedge or on pieces of waste ground. Every mass of weeds has its compacter plants as well as its looser, and it is the blending of the two which makes the beauty. I have already pointed out how the Anthriscus Sylvestris redeems from flatness the long levels of the mowing grass. Alter it in any respect, even by enlarging its flowers, and you would injure it, —the loose misty effect would be destroyed. And how should we like the meadow grass itself to have fuller ears, and to grow as stout as corn? Yet if such plants were in a garden, their defects would be real ones, through having lost their meaning, and we should thank cultivation for removing them. Now, to speak more practically, be all this as it may, the effects of cultivation

seem often greatly beneficial, without producing any material loss. They add fresh beauty to the flower, whilst detracting but little from its native stores. And yet, in making a fair estimate, we should remember that it is often difficult to be sure that what we know as the wild plant is the genuine thing, and not some stunted variety. For instance, that wretched little Pansy of our corn-fields, in which the petals are almost abortive, is botanically identical with the real Wild Pansy, which in favourable situations is a very pretty flower. And I had long been in the habit of setting down *Lamium amplexicaule* as remarkably unattractive, apart from its botanical interest. But I was surprised to find that Anne Pratt considered it the prettiest of the genus, and I see what she means from the figure she gives. Again, we must never be too sure that we have not overlooked some important loss, and

the caution is more needed because the improvements will always be showy. I think, then, we may assert these three positions:—Firstly, there are many plants, like Broom, Gorse, Foxglove, Hawthorn, Columbia, which seem to be absolutely perfect, in which it would scarcely be possible to conceive of an improvement which would raise the plant as a whole. You may produce new beauty by varying them, by making the Hawthorn scarlet, or the Foxglove white, but you cannot actually raise them. Secondly, there is another set of plants in which the improvements from cultivation are so marked as to be unmistakable, and seemingly unattended with any loss worth mentioning. Such are Wallflowers, many Larkspurs, the large varieties of the Dog's-Tooth Violet and Grape Hyacinth, our ordinary fruits and many kitchen vegetables, as rhubarb, fennel, or asparagus, and probably corn of all kinds.

Indeed, never could the advantages of cultivation be better seen than in our fruits. In the plum, the apple, the pear, what a variety of noble character has been created! Nevertheless, it must be remembered that in some flowers, as the Wallflower, still higher cultivation will finally alter the shape, producing that large lax type of petal to which we have already alluded, as one in which the form seems almost escaping from its bounds; though even this change may be valuable as the source of much new beauty. Thirdly, there are plants in which, though the flower may be greatly bettered by cultivation, there is clear and serious loss, as in the Pansies and Geraniums from which we originally started.

NOTE 3.

But is the work of Nature always perfect? Not always of the highest type of beauty cer-

tainly, for that was never intended. And there are many instances in which it is difficult to see the reason of the imperfection. What a repulsive smell the Daffodil has! You would have thought that something would have been selected more consistent with the appearance of that lively flower. It is the same with some other of the Narcissuses. And there is a species of Fritillary (*Pyrenaica*), one of the most graceful of all our spring plants, in which the rich variegated brown would lead us to expect a sweet sugary or treacly odour, but, on the contrary, we find a smell even more disgusting than the Daffodil's. The Starch Grape Hyacinth, too (*Muscari racemosum*), remarkable for the fruity hue of its beaded blossoms, whose flowers rub together with a crisp glassy feel, like that of a bunch of Bluebell stalks, when we press the spike betwixt the fingers, is in this respect

the same. Why should it be so? On the other hand, there are thousands upon thousands of flowers in which the least shortcoming of perfect beauty cannot be detected by the most critical eye. The thorns of the Rose or Thistle are of course no imperfections at all, but right and very beautiful in their place.

Note 4.

When any flower has attracted unusual attention, as has been the case for the last two or three hundred years with the Tulip, the cultivator is somewhat at a loss for special means of excitement. He then becomes a complete sensationalist. Sometimes he will try to gain notice by gigantic size, the fine vase-like curvatures of the Tulip being replaced perhaps by a monstrous broadly open cup shape, as seen

in Mrs. Loudon's plate. ("Ladies' Ornamental Flower Garden, Bulbous Plants.") Sometimes he will try by all sorts of eccentricity in the markings, colours being dashed together without any pretence of harmony. And still further disturbance may be produced by the idiotic freaks of fashion, the shape which is right to-day being wrong to-morrow, and perhaps right again in twenty years to come. Now the Tulip is a flower which ill bears to be trifled with. Under cultivation it easily becomes stiff and gaudy, and the utmost possible care is needed to make it look well. The original Tulipa Gesneriana I only know from plates, and it is unsafe to draw comparisons from these. But the cultivated plant with all its splendour is seldom perfectly pleasing; and this is certainly largely due to the one-sided modes of training, which seek after display alone. All our Tulips must

be fitted for the show-bed. Now I had a garden Tulip this spring which greatly impressed me by its severe and simple beauty. In the shape this was particularly noticeable. The corolla in its lower part filled out roundly and delicately like an urn, then somewhat contracted upwards, and again curved outwards at the points of the three outer and narrower sepals, thus clearly distinguishing them from the three inner broader and blunter petals, whose tips were directed inwards. The corolla was not large, and therefore required no stout stiff stem to support it; the stem had, in fact, just that slight amount of curvature which would redeem it from the appearance of formality. The colour was a fresh honey yellow, beautiful in itself, and well adapted to the form. It is difficult to recognise species in these garden plants; but I think that this is very likely to have been one of the common May

Tulips amongst which it grew: yet in the highest beauty and in character what a difference! Such flowers may not be fitted for display in a bed, but scattered here and there in twos and threes amongst the other plants, they will impress us as no other Tulips can. I believe that this kind of Tulip is common in our cottage gardens, and therefore I have noticed it.

The cultivated form of Gesneriana is often exceedingly fine when well rounded below, and allowed to curve upwards naturally. The waved streaks then assist the form. Tulips, too, look much less stiff when allowed to send up a sprout or two from the principal bulb, and ordinary garden Tulips can easily afford to do so.

Note 5.

One of the very worst symptoms of our modern taste is, its love of variegated foliage. Leaves

are the shadow of the plant; their colour needs essentially breadth and repose, as a foil to the light of the flowers. It is true that Nature will now and then give us leaf colouring of rare and delicate beauty, like that of the Cissus, or many kinds of tinting in purple and red, but still the main effect is nearly always quiet and subdued. Now look at our summer flower-beds; look at that Scarlet Geranium whose leaf edges are broadly buttered round with cream colour (I can use no other term which will express the vulgarity of the effect); consider first the harshness of the leaf colouring in itself, then its want of relation to the form, and finally what a degradation this is of the clear, beautiful, and restful contrast which we find in the plain Scarlet Geranium, and then ask yourself what taste can be where this is not only tolerated, but admired. We may perhaps obtain a really

beautiful leaf, like that Geranium leaf with variously-coloured borders in which a coppery tint prevails, but all this is essentially an imitation of withering, and wherever such plants come in largely their colour must produce the effects of withering, making beds look as if they were blighted. But this is only one example of the thousand discords which are coming into favour now. The gardener here has entered a radically erroneous path, and there will be little but baseness in the results. How often do we see the colours of a bed completely frittered away amidst contrasts of leaves which are spotted and streaked into every sort of deformity! That which is exceptional in Nature is made the rule, the rule narrowed down into the exception. How can breadth of effect, or anything but the utmost frivolity, be possibly gained by means of such barbarous plants as

these? And some of the large tropical Arums (*Araceæ*) of the hothouse, I know not whether naturally or as the result of art, are as harsh as anything I have named, green grounds peppered thickly over with bright red, or tricksily wrought out in cream colour. Occasional variegation in the leaves is now and then pleasing, though this can hardly ever be the case where plants bear brilliant flowers. Thus I like to see the Variegated Holly, or the creamy stripes of Ribbon Grass. These last are especially beautiful, because following the form of the leaf, instead of breaking it up like the Geranium whitewash I have mentioned. But the grass has no coloured flowers to spoil. And observe when the berries appear upon the Variegated Holly how inferior its effect becomes. We wish for the green leaves then. Amongst other leaf deformities, who has not noticed that hedgehog-

leaved Holly, where the flat surface of the leaf is trained to put forth prickles? What possible beauty can there be in this? High cultivation will always have its dangers, a tendency to strain after new effects of any sort, as witness the abominable colours of some of the most highly-trained Pansies in our markets; but high cultivation, when once started, as in the case of this variegated foliage, upon tracks which are radically wrong, can only produce evil without end.

Note 6.

I will give one instance of Nature's care for the look of the stamens and pistils of a flower. In the blossom of the Scented Violet the stamens form by their convergence a little orange beak. At the end of this beak is the summit of the pistil, a tiny speck of green, but barely visible

to the naked eye. Yet, small as it is, it completes the colour of the flower, by softening the orange, and we can distinctly see that if this mere point were removed, there would be imperfection for the want of it.

Note 7.

To any one who looks at the extraordinary beauty of the best garden Roses, at the sweetness and delicacy of the tinting, the delicious fragrance, and the large nobility of form, my remarks, so far as applying to them, may at first sight seem very rash. And if any exception could exist to what I have said, it would certainly be found in the Rose. The flower has a something almost human about it,—warm, breathing, soft as the fairest cheek; if white, no longer snowy like the Narcissus, but flushed with hues of animating pink; either flower, white or red,

being alike symbolical of glowing youthful passion. Nowhere else has the sensuous in a double flower such strength of imaginative appeal. But we must remember,—firstly, as to sensuous qualities, that we have only made comparison with our native hedge Rose, and not with the original of the garden plant in a single state, and developed by cultivation. Secondly, it is admitted that the double flower may far excel in particular kinds of effect, the various beauties of the single being restrained by mutual concession to give best effect to the flower as a whole. Thus the higher you cultivate the common Pink the less has it of animated expression: there is, consequently, more of this expression in the best double Pinks of the cottage garden, least of all in the splendid Carnations I have already described, which are just like gorgeous patterns. Now the best double flowers do cer-

tainly gain much in dignity, one of the highest of all possible qualities. And in their own especial kind of dignity the single flowers can never vie with them. These last can give us the dignity of the open empty cup, as we see in the common Lilies and Water-lilies, but they can never fill the cup, and expand it into a head, because that would spoil the stamens, which are the life and light of the whole. Yet not even here are the single flowers to be considered as driven from the field. What they cannot do separately they can when united in a mass. The heads of the larger Rhododendrons can vie even with the double Peonies in majesty, and have, besides, that life which the Peony lacks. But this kind of dignity is comparatively rare amongst single flowers, whilst it is the especial boast of the better class of the double. The lower double flowers aim chiefly at a pat-

terned neatness, as we see in the Hepatica, the white Wood Anemone, the white Ranunculus, and others. Notwithstanding this confession, we must not be too hasty, and say that this kind of dignity cannot be found at all in the single flowers taken separately. There is something approaching it in the Iris, and other such blossoms where the stamens lie concealed. Blossoms of this sort more nearly approximate to double ones in their effect. They give up expression for magnificence, and gloriously lovely as they are—for I think few plants are lovelier than the Irises—we feel here an inferiority to the open flowers. But mark particularly how the Iris differs from a double blossom, how much more preciseness of aim there is in the parts, a few grandly-managed elements most carefully individualised, and how comparatively slight is the tendency to repetition. In the double

flower, on the contrary, we are struck by the comparative feebleness of plan. There is constant repetition, the petals crowded together numberless, and with far less care for the individuals, which in many cases melt up into almost shapeless confusion, and can only be looked at in the mass, as in the double Tulip and Hollyhock. This marks, of course, a certain deterioration of character. Whenever, on the contrary, the parts are more cared for, they begin to give a look of stiffness, because there are too many of a similar kind. The Carnation and Dahlia, for instance, have much the effect of patterns.

Note 8.

As the result of that wish for large size which every gardener approves, we find that highly-cultivated flowers are apt to have a look of weakness. The plant impresses us as soft,

loose, nerveless, and as certain to be injured by the least untoward circumstance. It is often unable to stand in its own unassisted strength, and needs all kinds of artificial protection and support. And this is because the healthy balance is destroyed, because one part is cultivated out of proportion to, and therefore to the disadvantage of, the rest. As compared with wild plants, it is like some sleek, fattened-up domestic animal beside the wild or well-worked creature with its sinewy limbs, and scarce a particle of superabundant flesh. All that you see in the latter is needed for activity or strength. Now wild plants require no artificial support, their fabric is justly proportioned, and they can therefore stand without finding their own weight burdensome. When we, therefore, look at the blossom-laden Fuchsia in a flower-show, which requires a prop for every limb, however we may admire

the beauty of the flowers, let us never forget how artificial such treatment is, how altogether incompatible with a well-balanced perfection of the plant. What should we think of such a system of training applied to human beings, which gave large intellect and a noble countenance at the expense of a debilitated frame? You may say that the cases are not precisely parallel, because in man the general health would here be deranged, while in plants it is not necessarily so. But supposing that the general health could be equally unaffected in man, would that make any difference? Would these mental advantages be well bought for a nation at that large expense of physical? Yet I do not condemn this mode of flower training when it effects any worthy improvements, provided always that these highly-cultivated forms are not allowed to drive out the others.

We sometimes find an author speaking of branches breaking down under their load of fruit as if he considered this a beauty. It is just as much beautiful or desirable as to see the body destroyed by an over-activity of the brain.

PART III.

VEGETATION.

I.

SPRING AND SUMMER VEGETATION.

THERE is a characteristic difference betwixt the earlier and the later flowering plants in the mode of putting forth their blossoms. Trees or shrubs of the later type seem generally to prefer to develop these blossoms from the extremity of a lengthy shoot; in the later examples of the type, such as the Clematis or Rose, no trace of flower-buds appearing till the shoot has nearly perfected its leaves.* In earlier examples, however, like the Horse Chestnut or

* By "shoot" I mean the stem of this year's growth, as contrasted with the branch, which comes from some former year.

the Lilac, the flower-buds are distinctly visible from the first, and come to perfection almost simultaneously with the foliage, or in other cases even a little sooner, so that the plant when in bloom has an unfinished half-developed look. It is altogether different in the case of those trees and shrubs which flower in the early spring. Here the blossom, instead of being borne upon a shoot, is put forth close upon the branches. In the common Hazel, for instance, or in the yellow Cornus Mas of the shrubberies, it lies all the winter just ready for unfolding, and then opens at once before a leaf is visible. As the season advances, we find blossoms upon longer stalks, and accompanied by a few young sprouting leaves, or perhaps, as in the flowering Currant, they appear amidst a general bursting of the leaf-buds, so that the plant when in bloom has the unfinished, half-developed look of which we

have already spoken. The wild Sloe, or cultivated Plum, the Elm, Mezereon, and the early Willows, will furnish us with other examples of this type.

And what has been said of trees and shrubs will hold good also of the herbaceous plants. In the first few months of the year, we do not so commonly find arising a loose, much-branching, leafy structure, like that of the Buttercups, or the Umbelliferæ (Hemlockworts), and other of the later bloomers. We have a greater number of those low, compactly-built plants, such as the Dandelion, Coltsfoot, Violet, and Daffodil, whose flowers come straight from the root, and seem as if they had been placed there just ready for unfolding. And in plants of a different description, as the Water Blob (*Caltha palustris*), which gilds the early marsh with such sudden splendour, or the Ground Ivy and Chickweed, there is a

marked tendency to assume a like general aspect.

Now what is the object of this characteristic difference of type? In the first place, evidently, that in the early flowerers the bloom should be evolved as rapidly and with as little preliminary effort as possible. The earlier the plant has to blossom, the less work it must have to do before the blossom is put forth. Besides, longer stalks or leafy shoots would expose a larger surface unnecessarily to the cold. And this might prove injurious to even the hardiest plants, as we often see the foliage of the Elder and of other trees early in their leaf suffering most severely in the biting winds of March. In the second place, by this arrangement all undue interference is prevented, so that everything in its season may appear at full advantage. Blossoms in the summer-time would be in danger of being hidden

by the leaves if they came forth close upon the branches. This type is accordingly made to belong characteristically to the season in which leaves are imperfectly developed, and the summer blossoms are generally placed upon stalks which carry them beyond the foliage. Arrangements of the same sort for preventing interference hold everywhere in the kingdom of plants. The humbler must come forth first, where the higher would rise up to veil them, and must therefore principally belong to an early season of the year. The early spring flowers would be little noticed if they came first in the deep grass of May or June. Daisies may be found there it is true, but not those rich milky stars which dapple the soft blue-green of the April meadows; the little Celandine is gone, the golden day-fires of the Dandelion have lost their brightness, and it has almost ceased to burn even like a pale candle in the

grass. Any of these flowers may linger, but their early loveliness is fled.* We find the same thing again in the woodlands. There is no interference there, except such as constitutes an advantage. That rich carpet of Anemone, Violet, and Primrose might be choked by the thick undergrowth if it bloomed in the summer-time, or be too much veiled by the foliage of the trees if that were developed earlier. But as it is, in early spring the slight shade of the naked boughs gives warmth and protection, so that the flowers can come forth sooner, and possess a beauty which is wanting in less sheltered spots. Look, for instance, at those splendid Violets, large-flowered, long-stalked, which we find growing in the

* Daisies are both common and beautiful in early summer. In the month of May their numbers are greatly increased, but they have become of far less absolute importance, are crowded by the other plants, and never can rival the beauty of the April meadow-flower.

woods, or compare the wide-eyed woodland Anemones, in all their ethereal loveliness, with those which blossom in the open fields.

Then, again, the full summer heat has a mischievous influence upon many of the woodland plants. We notice, for example, in a garden that the much-exposed Primroses are often damaged in the summer, and never have the same beautiful appearance as those which grow under proper cover. So it has been wisely arranged that the leafy canopy of the woods shall just thicken in proportion as the sun gains strength, in order that there his rays may be ever tempered and subdued, and deprived of their power to injure. And thus in the woods these early spring flowers gain every advantage from their position and time of blooming. The soil at their roots is kept uniformly moist, and they are sheltered, not from necessary light, but only from hurtful extremities of heat and cold.

The third advantage of this low compactness of growth which characterises the early spring is the readiness with which it enables the land to be wrought upon by the weather. In winter there is the utmost possible bareness. The heavy sodden earth must be exposed to be cracked and riven by the frost, after which the air can freely enter and reanimate it. But when frost and snow are at length disappearing, the work is only half complete. The country has yet to be ventilated and washed. The earth is still being tempered by rapid alternations of heat and cold, the pouring rains and melting snows drench it, and are again dried up by the searching east winds. We can scarcely say that the work is accomplished till the time—

> "Whanne that April with his shoures sote,
> The droughte of March hath perced to the rote,
> And bathed every veine in swiche licour
> Of whiche vertue engendered is the flour;"

Chaucer's April being twelve days later than ours, and the March drought of which he speaks concluding with those dry east winds which we so often get at the beginning of the former month. Now it is evident that all this work will be greatly impeded by thick abundant vegetation, and that loose, branching, long-stalked vegetation would itself sustain much damage. Plants never tend to assume this latter character on the higher parts of mountains, or on open heaths or moorlands, or anywhere else where the winds play freely. And so the necessities of Nature lead to one of the most striking features of the scenery of spring, its openness and compactness. Everything is free, and pervious to sun and air. We never get that feeling of seclusion, of being covered in, so beautifully adapted to the summer heat, which takes away our activity, and makes us long for rest in the

shade. Then we have languor, meditation, and repose. Now everything is lively and joyous; little rest or lying down in the open air, for no dependence can be placed upon the weather and its humours, the sunshine ever rapidly alternating with the shower.

This compactness gives us a kind of beauty which we almost regret to lose. In the spring garden, for instance, when it chances to be well managed, what an exquisite neatness in the plants, a neatness which has no intrusive formality to vex us, those close little tufts of Snowdrop, Crocus, Aconite, or perhaps of the later flowers like Dog's-Tooth Violet and Anemone, springing up amidst shrubs and bushes all sparkling with leaf-buds, amongst ground leaves of such beauty that we almost regret to think that those Lupins with their radiating star crystals, or those bright young shoots of Monkshood, will presently start up

and riot in the wild luxuriance of summer. It is the same if we go into the open country, though there we find the withered wrecks of the past year, which the hand of art has removed from our gardens. It is singular how little careful Nature shows herself in some instances to make her work what we should consider as perfect. It is not only that she scorns a formal neatness, for every great human artist will do that, but that actually, as a part of her fundamental plan, she seems to wish to enforce a lesson of imperfection and decay, to remind us that the present state of things is insufficiently adapted to our wants, and always transient and underlaid by death. Thus flowers might easily have been made to wither neatly, for some, like the Gentianella, actually do so, resembling unexpanded buds, or they might have shrunk back into their calyces almost unnoticed amid the splendour of new-

awakening blossoms. But these modes are exceptions; the contrary is the rule. We were never meant to overlook decay. We cannot help noticing the disconsolate aspect of the fruit trees whilst their bloom is perishing, or that still deeper sadness which falls upon the gardens when the Lilac fades, and the gold of the Laburnum waxes pale, and the dirty brown look of the withering Hawthorn casts a momentary blemish upon every country hedgerow. A sadness soon passing, it is true, soon lost in a sense of the new beauties which are everywhere developing around us, but yet no less surely there. And this imperfection is no fault if we do but rightly understand it. It reminds us that earth is not the place in which to seek our pleasure, that snatches and glimpses of true loveliness are sufficient for us, to refresh us, and to tell us of a better world, and that these imperfect

glimpses are all that we must expect to gain. But what, after all, do these blemishes amount to, when justly weighed against the good? God's idea of the universe may be read in the heavens on any starry night. Stand near a town and watch the red lights in the houses, and think how much sin and evil are dwelling there; and then, quitting those mournful thoughts, look up to the serene, unblemished stars. How pure, how lovely! And yet, perhaps, if we approached them more closely, they would be much like the world we dwell in, which to them seems just as fair. Is the lesson then a mournful one, that all things are false and hollow, or is it not rather one of unspeakable joy, that sin and all the evil of existence shall thus vanish into insignificance when once set in comparison with its glory, when we shall be so able to contemplate God's work in its vaster proportions, as will only be possible

in looking back upon it from the immeasurable distances of eternity? And so we find that the withered wrecks of dead plants are really answering a purpose by staying with us so long. It would have been easy to have made them disappear with the approach of winter, but this would not have accorded with Nature's aims. They stand ugly till perhaps the middle or end of April, when faster decay and the rapid advance of the season clear them off. And if we study them aright they will really afford us pleasure. They give quite a peculiar aspect to the country, the new things being made to gradually replace the old. After the frost and snow have shattered the few last remnants of the summer, the fields are a dead, dull expanse, and very sweet it is to mark the cheerful green rising up and conquering the barrenness. And though perhaps it would be impossible to care

much for last year's withered grass stalks, except as the frail ghosts of departed friends, we may certainly watch the bright green leaves springing up in the ditches amongst the old dry pipes of Hemlock (*Anthriscus*, &c.), and gain much pleasure from the contrast.

II.

ON THE WITHERING OF PLANTS.

AFTER seeing any flower for a certain length of time, we almost necessarily tire of its beauty. This is especially the case if it belongs to an uncomfortable season of the year. For instance, dearly as we love the Snowdrop, it soon begins to gather round it a train of recollections of cold and gloomy weather, and as we look upon it day after day, and its first charm loses force, these disagreeable associations gain ascendency in a like proportion. Besides, each flower at the time of its first appearance is adapted to fill some characteristic place in the landscape, but before it passes away the features of the landscape have

changed, so as to harmonise more perfectly with the newly entering generation of blossoms, which are bursting upon our sated eyes with all the advantages of novelty. The Snowdrop is thus extinguished before the Crocus, and the Crocus before the after flowers. The scene must never be vacant, the old must remain with us till the new is well unfolded; but we care little for the last lingering blossoms, and even if they were as lovely as ever, they would remain as a thing of a bygone day, in which our interest has ceased.

Now if there were no withering, and the petals continued perfect till they fell from the stalk, a flower would contrast with its successors at a great disadvantage—we should feel that it was being outshone by them. But Nature will not permit her favourites to be dishonoured in this way, and she quietly withdraws them from the rivalry. When we have seen them as long as

she thinks good to permit, she lays their beauty waste. But before this is done, a close observer will notice that the plant's most subtle and exquisite attractions have been stolen away imperceptibly, so that even whilst there is no sign of actual decay, the power of enchantment is lost, and that which finally palls upon our memory is not the flower, but the flower robbed of its soul, a mere copy of the great original masterpiece. And to carry out this principle the more effectively, the later blossoms of a plant are nearly always made strikingly feeble and imperfect, so that we may most distinctly feel that the day of its glory is past.

And even those plants which have goodly fruit, or which develop new beauty in decay, must be banished from our sight for some time after their bloom is spent. We see this very conspicuously in our fruit trees; and even the Horse Chestnut,

though perhaps more uniformly beautiful than any other flowering tree we know, must wait after the white blaze of its flower-corns is extinguished before it may show its prickly balls of fruit, or the broad majesty of its hand-like foliage.

And for plants which are said to bloom at all seasons the law is generally the same. Their beauty is at the best but at one brief period; for the remainder of the year they sink into comparative insignificance. Take, for instance, the "never-bloomless" Furze. There is perhaps no time, especially in the winter months, in which it would be impossible to discover at least some few of those bright yellow blossoms shining forth amid the darkness of its spacious branches. But the time of its full magnificence is May, and only then do we see those glorious spikes of bloom, studded thickly as if with almonds, which,

especially in the county of Devon, form one of the most striking beauties of our forest lands. The plant looks ragged and miserable for some long while after this golden hoard is spent. And the Daisy, Dead Nettles, and Groundsel obey the same law as the Furze, though the Daisy lasts very long in bloom. The Groundsel is probably at its best in winter. In summer we are too apt to think of it only as a nuisance, and do not give it credit for the beauty it really possesses when growing in a fertile soil.

Very few flowers make a creditable appearance when withering, and scarce any of our common ones can be said to wither into new beauty; this is reserved for the less brilliantly coloured leaves. And though I cannot say how far the law will apply, it is the trees with inconspicuous flowers, like the beech and elm, which make the most splendid appearance in our October woods.

Now why is this wearied feeling with which we look upon the fading Snowdrop so different from that with which we contemplate ruins and other memorials of the past? Because these tell us of the unknown and visionary, and tend to make it real, or of that well-nigh forgotten past which we love to recall; whilst the withered or unseasonable flower is connected with the immediate past, or is but the dregs of a beauty of which we have drunk our fill. And it is principally the early flowers which weary us when past their season, because they carry us back to a less perfect time. How miserable it is on some cold bleak upland to meet with Sloe blossom in May! It seems to recall us to a world which we rejoiced at having left behind. It is the same, though in a less degree, with Hawthorn at the end of June. The vegetation of May is supremely lovely, and we could well enjoy it longer, but this

stray blossom gives us only such a taste, such a faint reminder, of that loveliness, that the tedium of the past is uppermost, and we are wearied more than pleased. But we never grow tired of the last lingering flowers of summer, for there are no new-comers to eclipse them, and, besides, they are clothed with the last sad splendour of the departing year, which burns slowly away in long increasing beauty through the solemn grandeur of October, till the damp November mists come down like a shroud, and then all is extinguished, the last leaves shiver from the trees, and the last ripe fruit drops pattering to the earth. These relics do not tell us of a dreary time, and the very sadness of autumn is swallowed up in the sense of its more than earthly loveliness. It is as with the fall of music, it is passing from us, yet it moves so sweetly that we would not bid it stay.

Nor is the feeling disagreeable when the flower really serves to connect us with an unknown past. When walking in the Jura woods in early summer, I have felt the intensest pleasure in starting upon the faded wrecks of some unaccustomed spring flowers, for the Jura spring was unknown to me, and these seemed dark entrances through which I could catch some far-off glimpses of its beauty. Again, we often find in summer that our feeling is just the contrary to that of which we have been speaking. Many a bloom will pass too rapidly in that crowded procession to permit more than a glance at its most precious beauties. We would often call a halt to look a little longer; but no, that cannot be. The plant remains in abundance, but its special beauty is often as fleeting as the sunset, and is perhaps visible only in the choicest specimens. The "darling blue" of the little Speedwell, as

Tennyson calls it, will be often found thus transitory. Specimen after specimen may we examine, and find it only grey, and when we have at last discovered the genuine tint, the corolla drops almost immediately from the gathered stalk, and the colour will never reappear in the succeeding flowers.

THE END.

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